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February 1, 1881.

NO. 64. VOL. III. PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS, 98 WILLIAM ST., N.Y. PRICE, 5 CENTS



SHE ALMOST RAN AGAINST A MAN SERVANT.

What Jealousy Did; or, The Heir of Worsley Grange.

BY ALICE FLEMING.

CHAPTER I.

CROSS-PURPOSES.

"DINNER is ready, Frank, and so am I!" said Liliane Forrester, in a gay tone, as she tapped lightly at the door of her husband's dressing-room before running down-stairs. For he and she—he, good-tempered, good-looking, well-placed in this difficult world; she, young, fair, well-dowered, a bride of but four months' standing—had chosen so to prolong

their ride on that pleasant winter afternoon, that night had closed in ere they cantered up to their own door. Then they found the architect waiting, with plans for the new conservatory Frank proposed building: and thus the evening meal had been delayed an undue time.

It was now past eight o'clock, and usually they dined punctually at seven. It was for this reason that Liliane had thought it as well to give Frank a reminder that she was dressed, for he would never suppose that she could be ready as quickly as he.

Instead of a glad voice replying to her summons, the door yielded to her light touch, and pushing it quite open, she peeped in to make sure that her husband was not there.

Could it be possible that dear, lazy Frank had gone down-stairs already?

Her graceful figure, robed in soft, gray cashmere, trimmed with velvet, came quite within the dressing-room; she glanced round the apartment, and was about to turn away, and hasten down-stairs, when she caught sight of a slip of paper by her husband's writing-table.

"Here is something the careless fellow has dropped," said she to herself, picking up the paper, and was idly turning it over, when she saw these words:

"Meet me to-night, Tuesday, by the hollow oak, within the grounds. Do not be a moment later than half-past nine. Yours, C. C."

She trembled from head to foot. The young bride, who would have been ready to die for Frank a minute or two previously, was now so possessed by jealousy, that she thought solely of how she might prove his guilt, and then leave him.

Liline was certainly quick to be jealous of her husband.

Once before Liline had alarmed him by the vehemence of her grief and reproaches; then he had quieted her fears, soothed her weeping; and Liline had ended by feeling ashamed of doubting him.

But how could she have room for doubt here? Had she not found the paper in his own room?

Shaken and tortured by suspicion, instead of taking the only right course—namely, showing the paper to her husband—she crushed it in her hand, and flew back into her own room.

There she snatched from a wardrobe a long, dark cloak, with a hood to it, threw it over her arm, removed her slippers, put on a pair of boots, and then ran down-stairs to the hall, where, leaving the cloak on a chair, she hurriedly entered the drawing-room.

"I have been waiting for you, dear," said Frank Forrester as she entered, smiling at her, and his look expressing so much love that, had she been free from jealousy, she would surely have seen that her suspicions were baseless.

But in that smile Liline saw only hypocrisy—a mask assumed to cover his guilt.

The next instant he had hastened to her side, thrown his arm round her, and asked, in a voice of tenderest concern, "Aren't you well, my Lily?"

"I think we rode too far; but it is nothing. I shall be better after dinner," she replied, in a choked voice, not responding to his caress.

But as at this moment dinner was announced, and as Frank attributed his young wife's pallor to over-fatigue, and hoped that it would pass off presently, he gave her his arm, and they walked into the dining-room together.

During the meal the presence of two servants precluded any unreserved conversation.

"The Worsleys are come home, I hear, Liline. They have been abroad for the last three months," said Frank, glancing at her anxiously as he made his careless remark, for she was still unnaturally pale, and had eaten hardly anything. Moreover, it seemed an effort to her to talk. "I could drive you over to see them to-morrow—that is, if you would like to go, dear," continued he, as she did not reply to his first remark.

"We will go, by all means," she managed to answer; but her voice sounded strained and unnatural, and real anxiety crept into her husband's heart.

In winning Liline for a wife, Frank Forrester accounted that he had secured a prize that he could not cherish too carefully. It was plain to him that Liline was not well; the reason, too, seemed evident, and he alone was to blame.

Had he not proposed that they should return home by Burmere woods—a *detour* which had prolonged their ride a good four miles? He wished he could obtain medical advice that very night; but Liline hated doctors; always declared that she had been accustomed to live without medicine.

To propose sending off to Doctor Homely, who lived a mile away, would irritate, perhaps even alarm her, and a few hours' rest might be all she needed.

"Do eat some grapes, dear. They will do you good. The most suffering invalid is allowed to eat grapes."

"Invalid! I am no invalid!" she said, with an asperity which astonished him.

"Come up-stairs and rest. We have overdone it. Perhaps you could take some coffee? And you must then consent to go early to bed, my lily flower."

"He wants me out of the way," she thought, bitterly. "I will go to bed before ten o'clock. That will be early enough, in all conscience," she answered, aloud.

Her manner was so strange that her husband decided within himself that she was really ill, and hiding the truth from him.

"She shall see Doctor Homely this very night. But I will say nothing about it till he is in the house, when she cannot refuse to consult him."

Liline rose hastily as he thought this, and sped so quickly up-stairs that there was no loitering together as hitherto had been the custom with them.

When they reached the drawing-room, Frank pulled a couch nearer the cosey hearth, placed her on it, fetched another cushion for her head, drew forward a screen that she might not be incommoded by the fire, and finally bent over and kissed her.

This was the crowning point of his iniquity.

"He can dare to kiss me—he who is going to meet another secretly!" she thought, and shivered, which poor Forrester perceived and felt an additional pang.

"Are you comfortable now, my Liline?" asked he, so tenderly that for a brief moment she did question whether she might not be mistaken.

But she said to herself, "If he leaves the room about five minutes before the half-hour, then I shall know that he is guilty. If he remains here, then—oh, then!"

There was rapture in the bare supposition that, after all, Frank might yet be true, even though, in that case, she must confess how grievously she had wronged him.

A servant entered with coffee.

"Now, dearest, let me give you some coffee," said Frank; "or would you like tea instead?"

"No tea," she said, faintly.

It had struck the quarter past nine. She would soon have her misgivings verified now, or happily cleared away. Only ten minutes more!

She knew well the hollow oak tree within the grounds! It took barely three or four minutes to reach it from the entrance of the house for those who were acquainted with the turns in the shrubbery.

The clock ticked on musically within its handsome case; the fire-light danced on the lofty walls, and on the pictures which graced them.

Frank Forrester sat down near his wife and sipped his coffee, furtively glancing at her every now and then, becoming each moment more alarmed at her paleness and silence.

"I'll go myself to Doctor Homely. It would relieve my anxiety to speak to him, supposing that he could not see Liline to-night. I should be with him before ten o'clock, if I went at once, as it is scarcely a mile to his house across the fields."

So decided Frank, saying aloud, as he did so: "Do you feel inclined for bed, Lily dear? Should you like me to carry you up-stairs before—"

He stopped short. He did not wish his wife to suspect his intended visit to Doctor Homely.

"Before what?" asked she, raising her head quickly.

How ill she looked!—how woebegone! He was infinitely troubled at her aspect.

"Before the usual time," returned he, evasively, as she continued looking at him in expectation of his reply.

"I will go up at ten o'clock; I don't feel inclined just yet," said she, sinking back on the sofa, and closing her eyes.

It was a dreadful moment. Every sound of the clock vibrated through Liline's heart.

"Will he go or stay? Is he true or false?—false or true? Oh! I shall die of agony!"

The "tick, tick" of the clock seemed to repeat mockingly, "False or true?—false or true?—false, false, false, or true?" until she could bear it no longer; and she started up, to find that Frank had risen and was about to leave the room.

She did not seek to detain him.

"Let me know the worst; there will be time enough left for me to die afterward!" she thought, as she drew a chair to the fire and took up a book.

"I will be back soon; but I have just remembered something that should be done to-night," he said, in affectionate tones.

Liline made an effort to say "Very well," with assumed carelessness.

Then he closed the door behind him, and was gone.

CHAPTER II.

THE HOLLOW OAK.

THE moment Frank had left the room, Liline sprung from her chair. She went to the top of the stairs and listened. Some one was moving in the hall below, and, peering over the banisters, she could discern a glimpse of her husband, hastily putting on an overcoat. One of the men-servants was there, too, to whom he spoke, hurriedly, and then passed on to the entrance.

She watched till the servant had returned after opening the door; then flew below, caught up the cloak she had placed in readiness on a chair before dinner, found, as she anticipated, that the key was only turned in the lock of the outer door, and opening and closing the latter with precaution, found herself an instant later in her own grounds, in the dusk of evening, and with the night winds blowing about her.

We have said that it was winter, and so it was, though the extreme rigors of the cold season were supposed to be past, as it was now near the end of February. The day, too, had been very pleasant for the season, and there was a clear sky, out of which the stars were shining.

Liline paused not a second; but drawing her cloak round her, and shrouding her head in the hood, sped on, listening once or twice for her husband's footsteps ahead. But she could distinguish no sound, save the swaying of the bare branches in the fresh breeze.

She rushed down the side-path, and came all at once upon the hollow oak.

The old tree stood near the side of a broad walk, and there was a clear space round it; so that as Liline (now treading cautiously on the damp greensward) approached, she could perceive without difficulty the absence or presence of any one near it, even though she had only the light of the stars to guide her.

No one was there as yet.

"Liline, with all her pulses throbbing painfully, stepped a little out of the beaten path, and watched for the approach of some female figure.

Who would she prove to be?

Oh, how she—Liline—would confound the pair after they had met! How she would crush them by her sudden appearance!

They must shrink, then, from her just and righteous indignation.

And when she had confronted them, and spoken a few words of withering scorn, then she would go from Frank's house to the shelter of her father's roof.

She would go to-night—to-night!

There was a train which started from Rickston—the next village, but two miles off—at eleven o'clock, and she would let that bear her from her false husband's roof at once, even though she went as she was—with only her cloak wrapped round her.

So decided poor Liline as she stood watching

for the woman who was to meet Frank. But this expected person came not as yet.

Hush! Half-past nine boomed out upon the night air.

She would be here directly, doubtless.

"Do not be a moment later than half-past nine!" Too well Liline remembered the injunction on the strip of paper, the finding of which had overturned, in one moment, all her security and peace.

The chime of the church clock was still ringing on the night air, when a footstep became distinguishable, coming hastily in the direction of the tree.

Liline could hardly support herself.

On it came, and the figure of a man was perceptible, approaching the hollow oak; and in the dim light, the hight, the broad shoulders, the wide felt hat, well matched her husband's.

The man went round to the opposite side of the tree, and Liline lost sight of him; but she knew he must be there waiting for her rival.

A minute passed thus, and was never afterward recalled by Liline without a shudder of infinite dread.

The quiet stars glistened far above through the bare branches, as the night wind swept by.

When would *she* come—this woman, who had enjoined her husband "not to be a moment later than half-past nine?"

Five minutes had passed after the half-hour, and still she came not.

How patiently he waited there, without making a sound or movement!

Was he still there? That was the next thought which entered Liline's tortured brain.

Had he slipped away to meet the woman further off?

Carried away by her feelings, the young wife suddenly lost control over herself, and came forward from her hiding-place, intending to confront her husband.

Ah, there he was!—motionless on the other side of the tree.

In an instant he had perceived her, and came to meet her.

There was no effort at flight or evading her. He came on boldly, she guarding the strictest silence; for it had swiftly occurred to her that he mistook her—his own wife—for the woman he had come there to meet, and that he would be altogether overwhelmed when he discovered his mistake.

"If not altogether dead to feeling, he will be covered with shame!" she thought, as she, too, made a few steps toward him.

When he was within a yard of her he spoke.

"We are late. Be sharp, now! Why have you kept us waiting? What do you mean by it, on such a night as this?"

He grasped her arm roughly as he uttered the hurried words, and she could not repel a faint ejaculation as she made an effort to fly; for—oh, Heaven!—this man was not her husband!

"Not so fast, my lady!" continued the man. "I don't let spies off so easy! You've come here, and now must stay a bit!"

"Let me go, instantly! I am Mrs. Forrester!" cried Liline, in great affright.

"Stop her noise, whoever she is!" said a second man who had come up, quietly.

And in a second she was muffled with her own cloak and hurried forward.

Resistance, such as she could offer, was futile; but she did resist with all her might, though conscious of the presence of a third person, as she was borne forward.

Unhappy Liline! Her agony is not to be described at thus unexpectedly feeling herself powerless in the grasp of—whom?

They stopped when they had gone some distance, and held a parley between themselves, warning her in savage tones that if she screamed or made the slightest movement they would at once knock her on the head. Half dead with misery and fear, she gasped for breath, and listened.

"I know Nan," said one fellow to another. "She's game; she's been prevented coming."

"There I think you're wrong," replied the other. "I've always misdoubted her. In my judgment she'd go agen' us if 'twas worth her while."

"Let her; 'twill be the wuss for her, whatever follers for us!"

"Stop jabbering! The question is, what are we to do? Why won't this fine 'my lady' do as well as Miss Nan?"

This proposal was received with a burst of hilarity, quickly subdued. The men then whispered together, seeming to dispute.

While they did so Liline had to remain under the shadow of a clump of trees. She was still in her own grounds, but far, far away from the hollow oak—far, far from Frank's protecting arms. What would be his feelings at her absence? All at once she was struck with the conviction that she had made a grievous mistake—that somehow he had nothing to do with those lines which she had read, and poignant was her remorse and agony.

A fourth person had now joined her captors, and the conference they held lasted several minutes. Then she was aware that some decision had been arrived at, and that one of them was going to speak to her.

"Listen!" said the one who had grasped her arm at the hollow oak. "You are safe if you agree to our terms. If not—well, if not, you must take the consequences! Don't dare to utter more than a yes or a no when I give you leave to speak!"

Sickening with unspeakable dread, she did listen intently.

"We're bound on an expedition to-night, and want a woman to help us. The one we counted on has failed us, and we've agreed that you shall replace her. If you are Mrs. Forrester you'll not find that so difficult; but you'll have to walk a few miles, though what's that to a young lady like you?"

He paused an instant, and then continued: "Well, now, the long and short of it is, all we want you to do is to go to a friend's house, and open the front door for us. Are you willing to do this—yes or no?"

Liline said "Yes," in a frightened, hollow voice.

What could she do, poor girl, alone with those terrible men? Even what they required of her was in great measure a mystery to her as yet.

"All right, then; but, remember, no playing with men such as we are. You do just as we tell you, and not a hair of your head shall be touched. Stands to reason we shouldn't hurt you, 'cos, you see, we want you fur to help us! And now for'ard! Cheer up, young lady. This time to-morrer, and you'll be safe in yer own house agen."

The half-fainting Liline felt herself urged forward, and dared not resist. She had to accompany one man a little in advance of the other three, who walked close behind; and in a short time they were out upon the high road.

The distant church clock now struck half-past ten. One hour had passed since she had left her home.

"Tramp quicker!" cried one of the men. "One o'clock to get there is quite late enough."

"There!" Where were they forcing her to, and what did they expect her to do?

"If we meet any one in these country lanes, which it isn't likely, though, you'll please to answer a civil good-night if I touch you; if not, you'll be silent," said the man, who was at once her guide and her jailer.

Then on they went a long time in silence. As the clock struck eleven they met two women, walking fast. How could they rescue her? The miserable Liline passed them in silence.

When they had got clear of the village, and were in the heart of the country, Liline's conductors signified that they meant to halt.

They were near a lonely, half-roofless shed by the road-side, and here they forced Liline to enter, and seat herself on a log of wood.

It was high time, for she could hardly sup-

port herself. The men hid themselves in the shadow of the opposite corner, and whispered together. From time to time snatches of their smothered colloquy reached her, and she gathered that they were waiting for something or somebody.

A long and fearful half-hour went by. The men became impatient.

"He's late."

"He deserves kicks instead o' ha'pence when he does show his ugly head!"

"There he is, jog-trottin' along as if he'd three weeks instead o' three half-hours to do it in!"

Such were the smothered exclamations which reached the ear of the agonized Liline as she sat on the rough log in the darkness of the half-ruined shed by the wayside.

And then, in the stillness of night, the sound of a horse's hoofs broke the silence, and a rough cart, drawn by a sorry beast, came to a halt, while the three men went out to confer with the driver.

The conference was very short. One man returned to the shed, and approached Liline.

"Now, young lady, the rest o' your share in this night's work will be easy, and not so long neyther. I'll be bound, the hardest part is holding your tongue! But come! We're ready! You'll have to mount into this cart, if you please, and then we'll soon get to our journey's end."

Liline stood up, trembling, and followed him. She could distinguish a roomy cart, into which two men had already mounted.

"In behind, young lady, and be quick about it!"

She scrambled in, crouching into a corner the furthest possible removed from contact with the thieves, as she rightly judged them to be.

A third man now squeezed himself onto the front seat, the fourth got in facing Liline, the late driver wished them "Success," then vanished; and the new driver urged on the horse, and Liline was borne on, she knew not whither.

For a whole hour they jogged on. None of them spoke, and Liline judged that it was nearer one o'clock in the morning than midnight when they drew rein in a grass-grown lane.

Liline looked about her, but could only distinguish a huge building, dimly defined against the sky.

"Now for business," said the man nearest to her, cautiously. "You see that house? That's the place we're bound for. When we get to it, we'll put you in at a winder, and all you've got to do is to open the front door for us. Then you're safe and free. Just tell the good folks inside that there's four on us, and 'tis no use resisting. We're all armed, and there's only six women in the house to-night, for the men are out on a spree, and the family is away on a visit for a couple o' days. You see we know all the ins an' outs. What can six women do agen' four armed fellers, all desperate? Now, ma'am, come on!"

She was dragged from the cart, and was forced to follow where they led.

And as they crept into the grounds of the mansion—the wide, unguarded mansion, sleeping under the starlight—and got upon the lawn, Liline recognized where she was.

She had been taken to the Worsleys, a house at least a dozen miles from her own home, and belonging to those very people Frank had proposed driving her over to visit next day.

And now her right hand was tightly grasped by the ringleader, and a revolver silently shown her. She was led across the ample lawn, saturated with night dew, which conducted them to the library windows.

There was a short halt in the shelter of a clump of shrubs on the lawn.

"Take these," said the man who had before spoken to her so menacingly, "and remember I am following you."

He held toward her matches and a tiny lantern, and she received them silently.

Apparently the plan of operations had been

decided on previously, for everything seemed perfectly arranged, and each to know what to do.

At a small side window they paused, and one man was instantly at work at the panes of glass. It was so small that Liline doubted whether it was possible that she could effect an entrance by its narrow aperture. But once through, she would be near the hall-door, as she well knew.

Oh, the agony of that moment, as the night wind blew about her, and the housebreaker deftly removed the window-panes.

"Now!" said one of the housebreakers, threateningly.

And in a moment she was clinging to the aperture just made. Then she fell forward on to a rug stretched under the window, and was within Mr. Worsley's mansion, an enforced abettor of thieves.

All was in deepest darkness. She recalled the words of her late conductors.

"If you're not at the door directly, we'll fire through, and leave you a dead woman at any rate! We won't be balked for nothing!"

Her trembling fingers struck a match and lighted the taper supplied by the robbers. She knew that one of them kept watch over her movements through the side-window.

"Open the door!" was hissed at her through the aperture. But she did not obey the command. Instead, she turned from the hall, and fled in the direction of sounds which had caught her ear—sounds of noisy mirth, which increased as she drew nearer to them, and the voices of men and women.

The sounds came from the ground floor; and now lights gleamed, and laughter was distinct, while the first notes of a boisterous song rolled out upon the air.

Toward these sounds Liline flew as to deliverance, half distracted by dread, and by thoughts of what Frank must be enduring. As she sped on, she almost ran against a manservant, who was carrying a tray containing wine-glasses. His astonishment may be conceived when he thus encountered a slender, lady-like girl, whose beautiful countenance expressed the utmost terror and bewilderment, and who seemed to be flying from some unseen danger.

A door at hand, wide open, gave a view of a well-lighted, large apartment, in which a number of people—perhaps twenty or more—were assembled at supper, and who were all talking together.

Into the midst of this gay party Liline rushed.

"Housebreakers!—four! All armed!—desperate!" she cried, and then sunk upon the floor, speechless.

CHAPTER III.

WORSLEY GRANGE AND ITS OWNER.

THEY crowded round her—that is, the women of the company; the men (of whom there were seven or eight) had seized each some weapon, and gone out to confront the robbers.

But when they reached the outer hall, and noted the broken window, all was in silence, and further search outside revealed nothing.

The intending marauders had fled, having, no doubt, distinguished those sounds of festivity which had drawn poor Liline into a place of safety.

When the latter recovered consciousness, she found herself in the lofty dining-hall at Worsley Grange; and there was the long table set out as if for a large party, but the occupants of the room had dispersed into little agitated groups.

"Where am I?" asked Liline, faintly.

"Quite safe, ma'am!" answered a portly matron, who hung over her. "Oh, how fortunate it was that we had a few friends in to see us to-night, ma'am, or the house would have been robbed for certain! But however you came into the midst of it I shall never understand till you explain, ma'am!"

The bewildered Mrs. Forrester was still too

much overcome with misery and fatigue to ask troublesome questions just now, or she might have wondered how it was that the "few friends" mentioned by the housekeeper who addressed her, were entertained in the visitors' dining-hall. The truth was, of course, that a large supper had been given that evening by the servants at Worsley Grange to their friends in the neighborhood, during the absence of the owner of the mansion.

But now that she felt herself in safety, Liline's first thought was for Frank.

She started up, wringing her hands, and crying out, "Oh, what will my husband do? He has not the least idea where I am! I was carried off almost from my own door!"

Then the weakness engendered by fatigue and fear and grief quite overcame her, and she fell back, almost unable to stand, sobbing in dire distress.

"You can never go back home to-night, ma'am," said the housekeeper. "I'll make you up a bed in Mrs. Worsley's dressing-room directly, and the coachman will drive you home as early as ever you please to-morrow, ma'am."

"But Mr. Forrester will be in agonies!" cried the distressed young wife. "Oh, I will see the coachman well if he will only take me now—at once!"

But all the women assembled there saw that she was in no state for a drive of a dozen miles just then; and so, by dint of assurances that a groom would start instantly, and would be there in an hour and a half, Liline was persuaded—by feeling her own inability to sit up—to let one of the men take a few lines to her husband, with an entreaty that he would come himself to fetch her early in the morning.

"Dearest Frank," (she wrote) "I am safe and un-hurt, thank Heaven! I was carried off by four men almost from our own door just after you went out to-night. I followed you; *why*, shall be explained when we meet. Oh, Frank, come yourself to fetch me home, for I am ill through fright and misery."

"Your LILINE."

It was not until she had received the groom's repeated assurances that he would give the letter into Mr. Forrester's own hands within an hour and a half (for which, if he was as good as his word, Liline promised him a couple of guineas), that the affrighted young lady could be induced to lay down her aching head in the quiet of one of the large chambers at Worsley Grange.

Once alone, when she had anxiously listened to the clatter of the horse's hoofs galloping off in the stillness, her throbbing heart turned anew to the first cause of her misery of that night. Was Frank true or false? Seeing that he had not met any one at the hollow oak, all that had afterward occurred had swept away her cruel suspicions. But now the questions recurred—Why had he gone out that evening? Was she quite sure that he was true? Oh, no!

And, as she tossed to and fro on the bed where they had placed her, the party below returned to their interrupted feast—all but the groom who had gone off to Mr. Forrester's; but careless mirth had fled. Who could joke at ease with the idea of housebreakers still lurking near, perhaps, and with the fear hanging over them of awkward questions which might be asked? Besides, it was pretty certain that Mr. Forrester would start at once for the Grange on receiving his wife's note, so it would be well to clear away the feast ere he could arrive.

But before we follow Frank Forrester to Doctor Homely's, we must say a few words about the Worsleys, since they are somewhat important personages in this story.

Worsley Grange, and all that went with it, formed a very handsome property of some thousands a year. The house stood in a well-timbered park, and the many turrets of the old mansion gave the passer-by an idea of its extent.

Everybody about the estate counted the owner a most fortunate man; and he was so, if mere ownership of a fine place entitled him to be so called.

No doubt he held undisputed possession of

the Grange; but years and years ago—before Frank Forrester had discarded his pinafores—an unpleasant story was rife, which, as it was never proved, died away as time rolled on.

With time, indeed, the feeling against Mr. Worsley changed into a feeling of sympathy for him, and his neighbors said one to another, was it to be expected of any man (especially one having several children) to forego accepting an estate worth many thousands a year which was lawfully his own, since it was left him by will?

To be sure, there was one person who had a nearer claim—namely, the son of the late Mr. Worsley; but the property was not entailed. The father had been at liberty to dispose of it as he pleased. The new Mr. Worsley kept the dispossessed son (Stanhope) at the Grange with his own children, was giving him a first-rate education, and, it was well-known, wished him to marry one of his daughters.

The first quick feeling of indignation, therefore, at the idea of a stranger inheriting the Worsley Grange estate in place of the heir died out, and the county people gave to the new owner the right hand of fellowship. It was now twenty-three years since the present possessor came to live at Worsley Grange.

The way in which he obtained the position he occupied was as follows; and the facts were well ascertained and uncontested.

Young Stanhope, Worsley's father, had been cruelly jilted by a girl to whom he was devoted. Suddenly, and only two days previously to that fixed on for their wedding, the young lady had written him a short, unfeeling note, saying that she had changed her mind.

The shock nearly killed him. All his efforts to see her were vain, and she refused to answer his letters.

Two months later she married a young man of rank, and went gayly off with her bridegroom for a cruise in his yacht.

No power to follow her there, or to get access to her. And if he had been able to see her, would that undo the past?

After this blow, Stanhope's father shut up his old home, and went to Germany, only to fall seriously ill far away from all his friends. A chance acquaintance in the hotel where he was laid up nursed him unweariedly, and when Mr. Worsley recovered he had grown to depend in every way on the man who had shown him such kindness.

What did it matter if people whispered that the devotion was *not* disinterested—that the stranger knew from Mr. Worsley's servant that Worsley Grange was a coveted property, and that his master declared he should never marry now? Mr. Worsley himself believed profoundly in his new friend's disinterestedness, and despite every effort from distant relatives to separate them, their intimacy grew and strengthened.

Five years passed on, and at length Worsley became so attached to the man whose acquaintance he had made by chance, that on the death of a cousin, the next relative, the owner of Worsley Grange made a will leaving the property to Richard Lanly, "the devoted friend who had brought him back to life," on condition that he assumed the name and arms of Worsley, on taking possession of the property.

Lanly had scarcely time to rejoice in his new prospects (he was a needy man) when something wholly unlooked-for happened. Mr. Worsley fell in love anew, with the fragile, dark-eyed, penniless daughter of the incumbent of the parish, a girl who had but just come home from school.

In despair Lanly tried to stop the match—in vain. The disappointed man married again, and took his delicate young bride to Italy.

But before marrying he made a new will, by which he secured to his friend Lanly a small estate he had bought in the West of England, together with eighteen hundred a year, should an heir be born to inherit the Worsley property. If there were no children Mr. Richard Lanly was to come into the estate, though only

after the decease of young Mrs. Worsley. She was, in any case, to be mistress of the Grange for life.

The marriage was a bitter and wholly unexpected blow to Lanly. He had not long to mourn his disappointed hopes, however.

His friend died almost immediately on his return from his wedding tour from cold caught on a mountain expedition; and only a few months afterward his young wife followed him to the grave, but not before giving birth to a son, Stanhope Worsley.

People had been aware that during his last illness Mr. Worsley had believed that he had dealt hardly with his faithful friend, Lanly, in so suddenly altering all his prospects in life.

The obscure property in the West of England was as nothing compared with what he had been led to expect; for what was eighteen hundred a year compared with Worsley Grange, and the more than eight thousand a year that went with it?

It was at this juncture that the story originated which had at first prejudiced Mr. Lanly's neighbors against him. The nurse who had attended the late Mr. Worsley in his last illness declared that the young bride came to the bedside of her dying husband, and implored him to remember his duty toward any child that might be born to them, and that Mr. Worsley had then owned that he wished above all things to keep to the latest disposition of his property, leaving the Grange to his wife and heir (should an heir be born), but that he dreaded his last moments being disturbed by Lanly, who left him no peace.

The nurse, on whose testimony this story went abroad, said that on being told by Mrs. Worsley to leave her alone with the sick man she had listened outside the door, and distinctly heard the dying husband confess to his wife that he knew now that he had made a mistake, that she was dearer to him than any friend, and that then he gave her a sacred promise that the will made just before their marriage should not be set aside. That this will was secure in the oaken box kept always in his room and in his sight. (This box the nurse had noted, observing how continually the sick man's looks turned toward it).

The poor bride was comforted; the will she dreaded could never, she believed, have effect, as the later one in her favor canceled it. Twenty-four hours after Mr. Worsley died, enjoining his wife not to lose sight of the oaken box.

His injunctions were strictly obeyed, but on the day of the funeral, when the will was read (the box being opened in presence of the lawyers), the first old will alone was found, in which no mention of Mrs. Worsley was made.

Lanly appeared to be as much overwhelmed as anybody; he behaved with such dignity and good feeling, that people believed his explanations and not the nurse's; or, rather, they thought that she had not rightly overheard the words which passed between the husband and wife.

According to Mr. Lanly's assertion, his late friend had often said that he knew he had made a mistake in marrying; that all his love had been centered in the deceitful girl who had jilted him; that he (Lanly) was dearer to him than any friend, man or woman; that he had given him a sacred promise about the estate, long before she, his wife, was anything to him. That now, in the near approach of death, he would not alter those arrangements, though his last moments had been disturbed by her urging him to do so; that Lanly had several children, and had neglected their interests for his friend's sake, and that his duty to Lanly was as binding as that of his duty to a child who might never be born.

Yet to show his desire to comply with what he believed to have been his late friend's real wishes, Richard Lanly retired from Worsley Grange, declaring that he should never re-enter it unless Mrs. Worsley should have a son, in which case he would bring up the boy with his own children (allowing his mother to inhabit

the west wing of the Grange); and he cherished the hope that should a son be born he would grow up to marry one of his daughters, thus inheriting the Grange (Lanly himself having no sons). Also he at once relinquished to the widow a third of the income from the estate (something near four thousand a year).

This conduct silenced clamorous tongues. Lanly might legally have taken nearly everything, yet he vacated the Grange, made a handsome provision for the widow, was sorrowful, courteous, and dignified. In spite of a few hard-hearted people who whispered that Lanly was not so magnanimous, after all; that he knew he was pretty safe in what he was doing, since young Mrs. Worsley was certainly consumptive; in spite of these cavilers, the majority of the residents near the Grange thought that Mr. Lanly had done as much as a man with several children could be expected to do, especially as he had undoubtedly neglected his profession for the sake of the late owner of Worsley Grange. And so, all things considered, they were satisfied. Besides, he had law on his side.

Then came the birth of the son, and the almost immediate decease of its mother.

Mr. Lanly immediately assumed the name and arms of Worsley, and the little boy thus disinherited was allowed to grow up as a son in the home that should have been his own.

He was a fearless, handsome little fellow, and there were not wanting people to tell him how the grounds he played in ought by right to be his own, since they had belonged to his father, but had been willed away from him; that, if he played his cards well, and married Miss Nelly, he might win them back again.

Little Stanhope would listen eagerly to these stories, often pausing, hoop in hand, his bright curls playing in the wind. But the mention of making a wife of Miss Helen, the smart young lady promenading with her governess, and who was nearly three years his senior, was not attractive to him.

"I'll not marry Nelly!" he would say. "Her nose is ugly!"

"Oh, never mind her nose, my dear, so long as you get her money; that's the chief thing in this world," replied his nurse.

"I shall mind her nose, nurse. Nelly isn't at all pretty, and I won't marry her!" persisted the young gentleman of five years old.

"Then Miss Lucy will do for you, my dear; she is a nice, gentle young lady!"

"She's not nice; she squints. I won't marry anybody!"

Though Nelly, and Lucy, and Sophia, and even the school-girl, Minnie, all tried to attract him as he grew up, they failed to win anything like admiration from him; and then, one day, not so long ago, something happened to make him see and fall desperately in love with a girl very unlike all these.

Not long after a certain Mr. Heatherly took possession of a cottage near Mr. Forrester's large house, Stanhope chanced to ride by. It was the time when honeysuckles bloom, and the young man took a fancy to gather some from the hedge-row. In grasping it with vigorous hand, he received a fierce sting from a bee, and soon his wounded finger swelled so much, that he was fain to ride back to the cottage he had just passed, and ask for some remedy.

Now, in so small a household, it was inevitable that sometimes Lucy, the one servant, should be out. It was so on this day, and Dorinda herself went to answer the summons at the door. It would be hard to say which was most confused, the youth or the maiden, at this first interview, in which Dorinda bathed Stanhope's finger, applying simple remedies.

His voice and his looks said more than his words as he thanked her, and most reluctantly rode away. Dorinda thought of him every succeeding day in secret, while he dwelt on her image every hour. At the end of the week he had hit on a plan to see her again—to ride over on Sunday afternoon to Crayford church.

Dorinda, as he had expected, was among the

congregation; and when the service was over he managed to overtake her in a quiet field-path which led toward her home. Her bewitching beauty was heightened by her frank simplicity. As they walked on together he learned that she had been born abroad, in New Zealand; that her father, the younger son of a noble house (having no fortune), had settled in that colony, and had died suddenly when Dorinda was but three months old, just after inheriting a rich legacy. That her mother, now dead, had soon remarried, and that her present guardian was also her step-father, who had assumed her mother's name, Heatherly. They had not been many years in England; Dorinda was not fourteen on their arrival.

"And I am so lonely, for my guardian has spent mamma's money and mine, so we see no society; and he is very stern," concluded she.

This was not the last interview between these young people. He entreated Dorinda to let him call on her guardian, telling her passionately that he could love none other than herself.

"Oh, no—no!" cried she, shrinking at the mention of her guardian. "He would separate us forever!"

But Stanhope persisted, and won her timid consent.

That very day, as the young couple were parting after a delightful ramble together in a retired part of the country, Dorinda's guardian came upon the pair. His anger was furious. He would listen to no explanation, forbade Dorinda to walk out at all except with himself or Lucy, and even accompanied her to church, forbidding her to leave the house alone, for he dreaded to think of any inquiry into the state of Dorinda's fortune, as must be the case if she married.

This is how it happened that the youthful pair were driven to stolen interviews, as we shall see hereafter.

CHAPTER IV.

DORINDA.

THE clocks were chiming a quarter to ten when Frank rung at Doctor Homely's door, and his disappointment was great on finding that the doctor was not at home.

"But we expect him every minute, sir," said the servant who answered the summons. "Won't you wait in the study?"

So Frank went in, controlling his impatience as well as he could. Half an hour slipped away as he listened to the noises in the street, and tried to read a new book he found on Doctor Homely's table.

Then he rung the bell and asked, "Is there any use to wait longer? I will gladly do so if—"

"In a quarter of an hour he's sure to be in, sir," interrupted the servant, "for the carriage is ordered at half-past ten to take him to Bulmere House. One of the young ladies there was seized with illness yesterday."

"I'm sorry to hear that. I'll wait, then," Frank replied.

And at half-past ten the doctor did arrive. But he was tired, hurried, unable to listen to Frank's anxieties.

"I'll look in to-morrow, my dear sir," said he; "but depend upon it, Mrs. Forrester will be quite recovered after a night's rest. She is not robust, but she has good health."

Frank then said "Good-night," and started homeward, half-wishing he had never come.

Though it was a fine night, the fields were so wet that he decided to go back by the road.

With swift steps he made toward home and Liliane, hoping she had not wondered at his absence. But there was a short, steep hill to climb, and he slackened pace a moment to take breath, glancing up at the thousand glittering stars overhead as he did so.

In withdrawing his gaze from the radiant arch above, and bringing it to earth again, he gave quite a start, for he had suddenly caught sight of a dark, muffled figure stealing toward a small gate which gave a side entrance to the

garden of an unpretending house near which he was passing.

What could any one be lurking around there for at this time of night?

He paused, for the small habitation was situated in a somewhat lonely part of the road, and he wished to ascertain, before going on, whether the person he had perceived had any sinister design.

Next moment he saw that the figure was advancing toward him, cautiously, and as if timidly. But far from sure that his presence was discerned, he awaited the further movements of the unknown.

The house near which he halted was called Moor Cottage, and both himself and Liline had felt much interested in one of its inmates, a young girl of eighteen or thereabouts—no other than the Dorinda Heatherly before mentioned. This interest was created by her youth, her striking beauty, and a certain air of mystery which hung about her guardian.

No one knew exactly who he was. Dorinda lived there with this eccentric old man, who visited nobody: though, as people remarked, how could he and his ward pay visits and receive guests when they had but one servant to attend to all the wants of the household, and one lanky lad to keep the garden trim?

Thus the beautiful Dorinda had reached youth's loveliest spring without any of its joys being ready to offer themselves for her acceptance.

And now, what if the person who was lurking at this hour of the night near the cottage meditated robbery?

Frank noiselessly drew back to determine what to do. He was soon aware that the muffled personage had seen him. She half unclosed the little gate, then put out a hand to beckon his approach.

Much wondering, he advanced, peered closely at the slender figure as the latter exclaimed, softly, "Stanhope!"

And then he perceived that he had been mistaken for somebody else, as, in the same moment, he recognized in the shrouded figure Dorinda herself.

"Dorinda!—Miss Heatherly!" he said, in extreme surprise.

She was utterly confused and terrified at his voice, and gave a faint cry.

"There is no reason to be alarmed," said he, reassuringly. "You know me, of course? I am Mr. Forrester."

"Oh, yes," she replied, in an agitated manner. "Good-night, Mr. Forrester!"

"Stay!" entreated Frank, detaining her as he offered his hand. "You must forgive me for presuming to speak a word of advice to you, my dear young lady, for my wife and I take a sincere interest in your welfare. It is no presumption which makes me say that—that—"

Frank was very much embarrassed. How could he ask this young girl, a recent acquaintance, if she had been going to meet some one without the knowledge of her guardian?

"Forgive me, but," cried Frank, dashing off the unpleasant words, "you are acting imprudently in being here now, so late, and alone. Let me, then, have the satisfaction of knowing that you are safe under your own roof before I leave you."

The only reply he received from Dorinda was a passionate though smothered burst of tears.

"You do not know—you cannot understand!" she said, pleadingly. "I am not imprudent; and here I am quite safe. Oh, pray, pray, Mr. Forrester, be silent about having seen me, and—and do not make things more unhappy for me than they are!"

"I should be grieved, indeed, to do that," replied Frank, kindly, and speaking low to avoid arousing her guardian; for he guessed at what her fears pointed. "Only assure me that you will soon return—within a few minutes—to the shelter of your own roof, and I will leave you."

"Yes, certainly, in another ten minutes or so."

"Then I will say good-night," added Frank.

"Good-night!" answered the girl in a smothered voice.

"Liline must talk to her, and win her confidence, as I could not," decided Frank, within himself. "She seems to be telling me the truth; but I declare that I thought she was going off to-night with some one! Left alone with that severe old fellow, Heatherly, it is enough to make her desperate."

Relieved in his chief fear that the young and inexperienced girl was about to elope, Frank withdrew—that is, out of sight and immediate hearing; but he came to another halt in the high road and got out of the way behind a holly clump, as impatient footsteps met his ear.

For it occurred to him that here must be the person whom Dorinda expected; and then it rushed into his mind that she had breathed the name of *Stanhope*!

It was not a common name; and Frank could not associate it with that of *Stanhope Worsley*. But he was not just now at the Grange. Who, then, was the *Stanhope* whom Dorinda Heatherly was willing to meet in secret?

Young Mr. Forrester felt two strong motives enchain him to the spot: a lively desire to know if this was indeed *Stanhope Worsley*; and a feeling that he ought to watch over Dorinda, though at a distance.

In another moment the approaching footsteps drew quite near, and a slender though vigorous form was seen under the starlight, passing on in the direction of the little gate.

No doubt it was a lovers' meeting! No doubt Dorinda was with this somebody now!

"Well, I will stay here till he repasses," thought Frank. "How could I sleep without assuring myself that that unprotected and lovely girl is safe?"

So Frank remained where he was.

He had been quite right when he made sure that he had fallen on a lovers' meeting.

When the young fellow he had watched out of sight got near the little garden gate, placing one hand on the topmost rail, he vaulted over it lightly, and began looking hither and thither for her he loved.

Dorinda had been so frightened by her encounter with Frank, a well-known resident in the neighborhood, that she had hidden herself till her lover should approach close to her place of concealment.

Not till she saw him unmistakably there, close to her side, did she venture from behind the huge laurel tree where she had shrouded herself from view.

"At last, my darling!" breathed the young man passionately, as he folded her in his arms.

"Oh, Stanhope," she whispered back, "you will be so vexed with me! I have been so foolish!"

"Vexed! Only with any one who has alarmed you, Dorinda. Why are you trembling? What has happened?"

And he drew her closer.

"I went to the gate to meet you, as I have done before. Some one came down the path, looking like you by this light. I put out my hand and said 'Stanhope,' very softly, and it was not you; it was—almost a stranger; a resident, too, in the neighborhood; and he may tell my guardian?"

"Who was he?" asked Stanhope, quickly.

"Mr. Forrester."

"Frank Forrester!" ejaculated the young man. "What did he say to you, darling? Did he suspect anything?"

"He thought I was here to meet some one, and warned me. He advised me to go back into the house within a few minutes, and I promised, because I was so frightened, Stanhope, and because I was sure he would not leave me unless I reassured him."

"I wish he were at the bottom of the sea!" said Dorinda's young lover, beginning to feel all the awkwardness of his situation.

"Suppose he should tell my guardian?" murmured the girl.

"He will hardly do that. But are you

really going to leave me in a few minutes?"

"I must!—I promised!" cried she.

"Then you must make up for leaving me now by staying a whole hour to-morrow, Dorinda. Promise me that you will come to the arbor, at the end of the garden. Indeed, I have something important to talk over with you. How are we ever to arrange about our marriage, if I see you only a few moments at a time?"

She hesitated.

"You'll come, won't you, Dorinda? Think how hard my lot is!—how hard your own! And don't we love each other truly? Have we not agreed to be true to each other all our lives?"

"Oh, yes!" murmured Dorinda.

"I shall be in despair if you don't come! In despair!" repeated he, passionately.

"I will come, then!" breathed she, softly.

"A thousand thanks and blessings, my own love!" he responded, encircling her in his arms.

"Now we must part!" said Dorinda, gently.

"I suppose so. Good-by, then, beloved one! Remember, to-morrow night."

"Could I forget anything which concerns you?" murmured Dorinda.

Once more he folded her to his heart; whispered that she was his sole and supreme happiness; and then, as she released herself and disappeared into the house, watched till the last glimpse of the beautiful girl had vanished from his view.

And then he turned reluctantly away, and sighing, regained the high road.

He had not proceeded far before he was startled by the figure of a man emerging from behind a group of hollies, who softly called to him, "Stay!—stay, and let me say a word to you, Mr. Stanhope Worsley."

"Ho! who are you?" said the other, coming to a sudden halt.

But even as he thus spoke, he felt sure that this man was the person who had come so unexpectedly upon Dorinda.

"I am Frank Forrester," replied Frank, in a cordial tone. "We used to know each other very well long ago, when we were boys together; but you are so much away from the Grange now. Surely, then, I may speak a word in friendship! Come up to my house, and be introduced to my wife—won't you?"

"I can't, Forrester, or I gladly would! There are reasons why I must not announce myself hereabouts just now—reasons of which you know and guess nothing."

"I am sorry to hear this, Worsley. Surely—"

"I understand what you want to ask!" interrupted Stanhope. "No; I have done nothing to make you shrink from introducing me to your wife!"

"But about Miss Heatherly? She ought not to be meeting you alone, and at night."

"Then how are we to meet? She is my betrothed!" cried Stanhope. "Don't judge me or her before you understand matters. You see, she kept her word with you, though she had no idea you were waiting here, or that you knew me."

"I hope she will make a friend of my wife! I cannot leave you like this, Worsley! Where are you living? What are your prospects? Of course I feel that by right you ought to be heir at the Grange, though by law—"

"Don't let us speak on that subject," interrupted the other.

Their colloquy was here disturbed by the voices of men in dispute.

"I don't want to be recognized here, because of Miss Heatherly!" cried Stanhope. "Good-by, Forrester! If ever I am in happier circumstances, I will come and tell you so. Good-by! Keep Dorinda's secret—and mine!"

And saying this, he struck into the fields, just in time to avoid being seen by several people; not that his features could be very plainly distinguished under the starlight.

Frank, pondering his adventure, soon arrived at his own gates.

CHAPTER V.

FRANK'S DARK CONJECTURE.

HE was met by a servant, looking very scared.

"What's amiss, Coles?" asked Frank.

"If you please, sir, we can't find Mrs. Forrester."

"Not find your mistress?" cried Frank.

"Well, sir, Mrs. Hart has gone through the house, and as it's so late—twenty minutes past eleven now, sir—we thought you ought to be informed."

Another servant came up—the housekeeper.

"Mr. Forrester, sir," began she, in tears, "what frightens me so about my mistress is, that we *saw* her go out after you, sir, and she's never come back!"

"Saw her go out after me!" echoed Frank.

"Yes, sir. She caught up a cloak from a chair in the hall, which cloak Mrs. Hart is certain sure was in her lady's room after she'd dressed her for dinner, and so Mrs. Forrester must have put it there ready herself, sir; and I chanced to be standing a-top of the stairs with Mrs. Hart, and we both saw mistress snatch up the cloak and go into the hall, and heard the click of the door. You'd just gone out, sir, so we thought Mrs. Forrester had followed you."

"You *saw* Mrs. Forrester go out?"

"Yes, sir, or as good! For she put on the cloak and went into the hall, and we heard the door shut to; and Mr. Coles, he found the door unlocked, and is sure he locked it after letting you out, sir."

"And this was at half-past nine?" said Frank.

"Two hours, or nigh that, ago," said the housekeeper. "And Mrs. Forrester wasn't like herself, sir. She looked distracted like and in trouble."

The housekeeper could say this! Then he had not merely fancied that there was something unusual about Liliane that evening!

"Have you searched *everywhere*?" asked he, with white lips.

"Everywhere, sir!" replied the maid, dissolving into tears.

"Get torches, lanterns, follow me into the grounds!" cried Frank, beside himself with fear.

And soon he was traversing the alleys where he and Liliane had paced together but yesterday, as evening fell, ere they sought their luxurious home when daylight faded.

Now what a contrast! With straining eyes he peered into every nook and corner, calling, "Liliane! Liliane!"

But no reply came to him.

"I think we've searched almost *everywhere*, and must wait for daylight now, sir," remarked Coles, fairly tired out.

Wait? Frank was in no mood to sit still till daylight. With tortured heart he rushed back to the house, to see if during his wild search without his dear wife had been traced. No need for his lips to frame a question; the sorrowful looks of the maids told him that she had not reappeared.

"I need not ask if she has been found?" groaned he.

"No, sir, no!" replied the housekeeper, in tears; "but something else has been found, and my mind misgives me sorely—though 'tis a shame to say what I think, such a beautiful and innocent young lady!"

"For Heaven's sake, speak! What has been found?" cried Frank.

"This, sir; in the drawing-room, by Mrs. Forrester's chair, where she sat reading when you left her."

This? What was it? A slip of paper! But what were these words, striking him to the heart?—

"Meet me by the hollow oak. Do not be a moment later than half-past nine. Yours,

"C. C."

Frank reeled against the wall, struck as with his death-blow. A dull, horrible pain

throbbed through and through him. He partially lost consciousness, and two of the men-servants had to support him.

As soon as he could master himself he spoke.

"Give me a lantern."

Two or three were there, and one, still burning, was put into his unsteady hand. He seized it, and rushed out again.

"Let's follow him," said Coles; and he and an under-footman did so.

"He's gone to the hollow oak!" they cried.

Yes, he had gone there to see if any footmarks, freshly made, should confirm the dreadful words on the paper found by his young wife's chair.

They had not to look about before plainly distinguishing footprints by the old tree.

Had Liliane—his Liliane—been there to-night, and that by secret appointment? With whom, if not with a lover?

At the frightful supposition his brain almost gave way. The sky above was not purer than was his lately-made bride! At least, so he had believed till that sickening hour. But who was he who signed himself "C. C.?"

Then dark thoughts surged in his brain—thoughts black with vengeance, as he recalled the till then forgotten fact that another man had loved Liliane before he, Frank, had won her, and of whom, before their engagement, he had been painfully jealous. The name of this man was Charles Crofton. Had not this man destroyed his peace by persuading Liliane to meet him—to desert her husband and her home?

He remembered now a chance remark made by a friend he had met when in town a week since, to the effect that he had met Crofton, who looked very triumphant, and said he was off to Homburg. Was it there he had induced Liliane to promise to accompany him? And was it her promise to go which had occasioned his look of triumph?

More mad than sane, Frank Forrester re-entered his own door.

"I am going to Homburg," said he to his man Coles. "How long I may be away I don't know. Not long, I think. Let my uncle hear what has happened. I shall travel day and night."

He would not listen to Coles's entreaty that he should wait for daylight. By driving a dozen miles Frank knew he could catch the earliest up-train. It was now two o'clock in the morning, and a brougham was brought round in haste, when Frank, deaf to all remonstrances from his servants—indeed, hardly conscious of what they were saying—turned his back upon home, and started on his long journey.

One thought alone burned in his brain; he would wrest from the man who had wrought such ruin his misguided victim—he would bring back Liliane! Not to his home which she had deserted—that could never be hers again; but he would place her with her own relatives—snatch her from the false light which had lured her from happiness.

To leave pursuit of her till she was in safe keeping—to let her wander in such guardian-ship, was agony.

And so he went on his bitter way. At a quarter to five o'clock he steamed out of the station, bound for Homburg, no one of his household knowing more than that concerning his designs.

Three quarters of an hour before he entered the railway-carriage, the groom, bearing Liliane's note, arrived at Frank's country house, and had some difficulty in arousing the tired servants, who had not long been asleep.

His horse had lost a shoe by the way, which had occasioned some delay; and after knocking again and again (two dogs barking at the stranger with all their might), a head was put out of a side-window.

"Who is it?" asked a sleepy voice.

"A messenger from Worsley Grange, with a note from Mrs. Forrester."

"Eh?" cried Mrs. Hart, leaning quite out of the window, disregarding the chill air of early morning.

"A note from Mrs. Forrester," repeated the man.

"She's never at Worsley Grange," exclaimed the maid.

"Yes, she is. It seems there was a plan to rob the house, and four men carried her off from her own door."

Consternation soon spread among the servants. The master gone off, half-mad, no one exactly knew where (for Homburg conveyed no very distinct idea to them); their mistress lying ill at Worsley Grange, after the shock of being forcibly borne off by housebreakers! What would she say when she understood what had happened at home?

But what could those words mean on the slip of paper signed "C. C." The opinion now was, however, that the mysterious note would be accounted for in some way not connected with their mistress.

"Here's a pretty business!" exclaimed Coles, when he had listened to the groom's account.

"I wish I had never found that paper!" cried the worthy housekeeper, looking forward with dismay to the coming day.

She might well do so. When Liliane (after an hour or two of broken rest) saw her own carriage drive up to the entrance of the Grange, and was told that her husband had not arrived, as business had taken him from home in haste, great disquiet took possession of her.

"Where is Mr. Forrester gone?" asked she of the servant, who approached to open the carriage-door.

"He went to town, ma'am. He had to go abroad," replied the man, confusedly. He could not tell his mistress the suspicion which the slip of paper had created, and all that had been believed against her that night.

Liliane was as one thunderstruck. Her husband gone to London, and abroad!

"Of course he must have had some telegram?" she said, questioningly. "But Mr. Forrester left a letter for me, surely?"

"Mrs. Hart will tell you, ma'am. She spoke to Mr. Forrester."

"Very well. Drive home as fast as you can."

The man's manner struck her as peculiar, and she would fain have questioned him more, only that she instinctively felt he would go on repeating that "Mr. Forrester had gone to London."

It was a long drive back, and even her own pretty house and grounds looked cold and dull as she approached them under this gray sky. Oh, why was not Frank there to welcome her—to hear her explanation, to make all things bright?

Her maid met her with so dismal a countenance that it added to Liliane's uneasiness.

"Hart," cried she, "James tells me that you know why Mr. Forrester has left home so suddenly."

"Oh, ma'am, we *all* know!" replied Hart, bursting into tears.

And then the terrified Liliane heard the truth; how they had searched for her (as she had been seen to go out after Mr. Forrester); how they had found the slip of paper, and all that followed.

"Mercy on us!" murmured the unhappy bride; "I found that paper myself to-night, and in my husband's dressing-room. I thought—I thought—that—some one had written it to him to make an appointment."

"And he thinks some one wrote it to you, ma'am, and he's gone off, half beside himself."

Gone off! but where? Gone off, believing her untrue. It was torture.

"I must find him, Hart, or I shall die! I cannot live in this agony!"

And then they told her he was gone to Homburg.

Liliane gave way after this, and sunk down in a fainting-fit; and the frightened servants telegraphed to Mr. Arnold Forrester (an uncle of Frank's) who arrived six hours later, to find young Mrs. Forrester unconscious, and raving about Frank, Doctor Homely in the house

(looking very grave), and the whole household in consternation.

Mr. Arnold Forrester was a middle-aged man, kind-hearted, but slow of action. To follow Frank seemed a wild-goose chase; but instead, he at once started for town, to see if he could learn anything of Frank's movements from his bankers.

He also telegraphed to a widowed sister of Liliane's, a Mrs. St. Clair, to beg her to come at once to Frank's house; and by that time he had done all that in his judgment could be done.

And still the questions remained unanswered—Who wrote the paper that had created all this mischief?—who was "C. C."—and who had been expected to come to the hollow oak?

CHAPTER VI.

HOW FRANK FARED.

SWIFT through the hours of early morning Frank Forrester was carried by the train to London; and at eight o'clock a haggard, wild, changed man, maddened by an imagined wrong, had reached the great city.

Fain would he have rushed on; without an instant's delay. As yet the feeling of burning revenge, of deep agony, took from him the sense of fatigue.

London was hardly awake at this hour in the morning—at least, the world in which poor Frank Forrester had always moved. The banks would not be open for a good two hours, or he would have gone to the house where the man he was pursuing had placed his money, as there he might, perchance, learn something of him.

But Frank would not consume two hours in waiting—in his present mood it would have killed him—and he said to himself: "Let me only get to Homburg, and I will track them if I go to every hotel and every house in the place!"

And so on again, without pause, till he was landed on the other side of the water, and found himself in the train again, speeding along for Homburg.

All the long hours of that day he traveled onward, and, but for the good and agreeable fashion which is prevalent in many places abroad of bringing eatables to the railway-carriages, Frank would have journeyed on without refreshment.

But at last he was conscious of a feeling of faintness, and tried to take something to sustain him till he had unearthed his supposed enemy, and rescued Liliane.

On, through the night as well as day, and till the next morning dawned, when he reached his destination.

Yes, here he was in Homburg; but his brain reeled, and he felt half suffocated with the thought, which pierced him like a knife, that here Liliane might be with Crofton.

He went to the principal hotel on alighting from the railway, intending to begin his inquiries that same evening, worn and weary though he was.

"What English people had engaged rooms in this hotel?"

"Monsieur should see the visitors' book immediately," was the reply to this hardly audible inquiry.

Distractedly he scanned page after page; and was about to close the book, when the last entry forced from him a sort of cry:

"Mrs. and Miss Crofton, on their way to England."

Mrs. and Miss Crofton! This meant that the mother and sister of the man he was there to take vengeance on had arrived in that hotel. They would know something, perhaps, of the whereabouts of so near a relative, though it was not likely they (poor ladies!) would be too accurately informed of his movements just now.

Frank closed the book, his haggard looks attracting the attention of the official at the desk.

"Are these ladies just arrived?" asked he, sharply.

"This morning, sir."

"When do they leave?"

"Ah, that he did not precisely know. They were waiting for the arrival of some relative, who was to escort them home."

"What relative?" continued Frank.

That again the other was ignorant of.

Frank struck his forehead with his hand, rapidly deciding that he would ask to see Crofton's mother, when gay voices and the clang of a bell announced the public dinner, and involuntarily the miserable man, for whom the ordinary occupations of life were suspended, drew back to keep out of sight of those hurrying to the dining-room; for the wretched ever shrink from the view of their more happy fellow-men.

Frank then drew back till the numerous occupants of the hotel, just then descending the stairs or crossing the hall, should be seated at dinner, when a servant approached him.

"Would monsieur join the public table, or take dinner in his own apartment?"

He looked up to give some sort of reply, and caught the sound of a fresh young voice, saying, "If mother would only let me join the public table, I should be delighted! It must be such fun! Won't you to-morrow, mother, now that Charlie is here?"

Charlie!

Frank looked eagerly in the direction of the voice, and perceived a young lady and an elderly one coming down-stairs, followed by—whom?

Frank's heart almost stopped its beating; for there, before him, wearing an easy air of unconcern, was Charles Crofton, the man he had followed at random. And who were these with him?

Crofton had not as yet perceived him, and was passing on with his companions, when a hollow voice caused him to stop.

"Stay!" cried Frank. Then the young Englishman looked in his direction, and exclaimed, with an astonished air. "You here, Forrester? I'm very glad—no, I'm very sorry to see you looking like this. Have you been sent abroad for the spring? But let me introduce you again to my mother and sister."

The next moment Crofton sprung forward to assist his acquaintance, who staggered back against the wall, and could not reply to the courteous bow and smile of either lady.

"Why are you here, Crofton?" gasped Frank, as his supposed injurer stood by him with a concerned aspect.

"Why? To escort my mother and sister home," answered Crofton, readily.

"We are on our way to England," said Mrs. Crofton, wondering what the agitation of her son's friend could mean.

"I must speak a word with you instantly," Frank rejoined, turning to Crofton himself.

"To be sure!" replied the young man, pushing open a door. "Come in here. I only arrived an hour ago; and, as the place is so full, I have to put up with this room."

Mrs. and Miss Crofton, seeing that they were in the way, walked on, and Frank found himself alone with the man he had panted to discover.

"Heaven grant that I have made a mistake!" broke from his lips, as he looked up into the open, fair young countenance, brimful of happiness, before him.

"Where is my wife?" added Frank.

"Your wife? What do you mean, Forrester?" asked Crofton, with an unmistakable air of surprise.

"I believed that she was here, and with you!"

The other was confounded.

"With me?" he cried, indignantly—"me? I am just engaged to the most charming girl in all the world. What grounds had you for believing me such a villain?"

In broken words Frank told him, the other listening with painful interest.

"Try to calm yourself, Forrester. After all, there may be an explanation. Have you left home without telling any one there what you were doing?"

"I said to the servants I was going abroad, to Homburg, and that was all."

"Telegraph to some one, then, at once. Suppose there should be an explanation?"

"How can there be? Did not the servants see her go out? Did they not find that paper, signed 'C. C.'? And yet she was like an angel of light! Am I in my right senses or not, Crofton?"

"I think not to-night," said Crofton, pityingly. "You suspected me, and you find me innocent. Send a telegram to some one at home, and then take my advice, and have a night's rest, or you will never get home yourself again."

It was due to the kindness of the misjudged Crofton that Frank was persuaded, or, rather, forced, to go to rest, and that he allowed him to dispatch a telegram to Mr. Arnold Forrester.

"Frank here, and very ill. Has Mrs. Forrester been found? Telegraph reply."

The answer came after a night of deep anxiety and anguish:

"Mrs. Forrester is at home, and at present lying unconscious through alarm and grief at her husband's absence. His return must not be delayed."

Liliane there—at home! Ill, too, through grief on his account! Hope, repentance, intense desire to fall at her feet and implore her forgiveness, took possession of Frank Forrester.

He faltered out a few broken words of excuse to Charles Crofton, entreating the latter to come to him the moment he had conveyed his mother and sister home; and then, more dead than alive, started on the return journey.

Traveling without cessation, he reached his home thirty-six hours after he had left Crofton, having sent off telegrams both to his uncle and to the housekeeper at home, to say that he might be expected immediately.

It was nightfall when he once more entered his own gates, and glanced toward the windows of the room Liliane occupied.

CHAPTER VII.

THE EXPLANATION.

THE door flew open at his ring, for Coles was in the hall, as if awaiting his arrival.

"Mrs. Forrester is better, sir," said he, speaking before his master's lips could frame the inquiry. "She recovered consciousness this morning; and when she heard you might be expected immediately, took a turn for the better, sir."

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated Frank, falling on a chair.

"Mrs. Forrester's sister is with her, sir, and—and she will tell you of the terrible adventure my mistress had the night you left home, sir. She says there must be an inquiry, sir; and she has put the matter into the hands of the police."

"What happened, Coles? Tell me in as few words as you can!"

"Well, sir, Mrs. Forrester was carried forcibly to Worsley Grange by four men—housebreakers, it appears—who seized her in her own grounds. Fortunately, the servants at the Grange had had some friends in to supper, and so Mrs. Forrester escaped unhurt. A groom got here with a note to you about four o'clock that morning, sir."

Frank was speechless. His dear young wife carried off by housebreakers! How cruelly he had wronged her!

"Mrs. Forrester is a good deal improved since your telegram arrived, sir. Her sister, Mrs. St. Clair, is just going to dinner. She is coming down-stairs now, sir."

Poor Frank felt like a culprit as he went to meet his sister-in-law.

"Can Liliane bear to see me, Agnes?" asked he, wringing the hand she gave him.

"The medical man enjoins great quiet and absence of agitation; but he says your presence would have a beneficial effect. And she has

been listening for your arrival all day. Ah, there is her bell! Depend on it, she has told her maid to ring and ask who is come."

Frank was already half-way up-stairs; he found Liline's door open, and the maid about to come out. Next he heard Liline's own voice.

"Hark! go down-stairs yourself. If that is Mr. Forrester—"

"I am here! Oh, my angel! can you ever pardon me?" cried Frank, falling on his knees beside her.

Then the maid softly closed the door, and left the restored pair together, while Liline uttered a joyful though feeble cry, and fell backward.

"Can you ever forgive me, Frank, for my suspicion? That has been the cause of all!" she murmured.

"It was I who suspected you!" said the repentant young man.

"Oh, Frank, you do not know! That dreadful night when you went away," said she, feebly, "I found in your dressing-room a slip of paper, signed C. C."

"In my room?" cried Frank.
"And I read it just before going down-stairs, and—and it nearly killed me. I said to myself that you were going to meet somebody that night by the hollow oak, and so I determined to follow and confront you. And the servants saw me go out; and then I could not be found, and so—and so— Oh, Frank, I thought I should have died when I understood what had happened, and how I was suspected!"

"And I, Liline—I thought I should have died! Oh, can I ever atone to you for all that you have suffered? Do you indeed forgive me?"

She murmured out her joy that he was beside her; declaring, too, that what had happened had been caused by her own absurd suspicion.

"If I had only shown you that paper, Frank, all we have endured would have been prevented!"

It was long before he could be prevailed on to leave her; but when she noted his haggard and travel-worn appearance, she became eager to send him to get some refreshment. And then came Mrs. St. Clair, protesting that so much excitement would kill Liline. After which she followed Frank out of the room, on pretense of making him eat something.

"Pray do take something by way of dinner, Frank, and let me talk to you while you eat," said she. "This is a very grave business about Liline being carried off."

"My dear Agnes, I must send a telegram to Crofton before I speak to you even on that subject. Let Coles take the message to the office."

Though it was too late that night to send off any telegram, Frank could not feel at ease again till he had cleared his dear wife from all suspicion.

Perforce he had to wait till morning, and to listen to his sister-in-law. And now, for the first time, he heard, connectedly, what had actually taken place in his absence.

Mrs. St. Clair talked long and eagerly, concluding with, "So that, you see, Liline was actually in the hands of a gang of desperadoes. We might almost as well be in a country overrun by brigands. And they will not stop there. They have been balked in their attempt to rob Worsley Grange in the absence of the family, and balked by your wife. Do you not think they will next seek revenge? I have, therefore, communicated with the police, and some one has kept watch every night since Liline was carried off."

Revenge themselves on Liline! Frank was, indeed, as much aroused as his sister-in-law could desire.

"I'll act at once," said he.

"A policeman is now in the house," returned Mrs. St. Clair.

"Let him come and talk to me while I have some food," said Frank, adding: "Oh, Agnes, this business has half killed both me and dear Liline!"

"I see it has," answered she; "but if it serves to make you trust each other more entirely, the suffering will have been a blessing. Liline is so wrapped up in you, Frank, that she trembles lest your devotion for her should be disturbed. When will she and you both learn that your affection, if it is worth anything, will stand many a test, and that it is impossible to love one day and forget the next?"

"Agnes, you are right; but that dreadful paper! How it misled us both! It seemed evidence, you know."

"Well, I will not lecture you to-night. My own thankfulness at seeing you here cannot be exaggerated. Now I will run up and look at Liline. She may need a composing draught."

And so she left him, to find that Liline was benefiting by the best possible composing draught any one can have—peace of mind—and that she had fallen into a refreshing sleep.

When Mrs. St. Clair went back with this news to Frank, the policeman before mentioned was being ushered into the dining-room.

"I want you to tell me your opinion of this business," began Frank, when they were alone.

"Yes, sir. That's soon done. The thing is to appear to go off on one tack, and to be at work on another in reality. It's plain enough to me, sir, that some one in your own house is in league with this 'C. C.' I've been here long enough to know how many servants you have, and which is which; and I've found out that on the night in question all of them were at home except one, an under-housemaid, named Fanny Earle, who went out to tea, but returned soon after nine o'clock."

"What?" cried Frank, with a start. "I should be grieved enough to suspect that girl! Mrs. Forrester likes and trusts her very much. We know all her family, too."

"And I don't suspect her, sir. She was out that evening, and could easily have stayed out a few minutes longer had she wished to meet any one by the hollow oak. No, no; it wasn't that young woman. Well, now, then, it narrows itself to this, sir. It was some one who went into your dressing-room that evening. Who would be likely to do that?"

"One of the maids—the housemaids, I suppose. Stay! Fanny Earle was out, you say, so some one else must have performed her duties that night. The head housemaid, I suppose, but she is a sister of Fannie Earle's, and has lately been incapacitated from doing her usual work by having strained her thumb," said Frank.

"Then it was one of the other maids, or one of the men, who was in communication with 'C. C.' Of course it might just as well be a man as a woman, only that a woman was evidently expected at the hollow tree. Now, sir, what you must do is to be silent, and have down a London detective. He'll sift the matter if it is to be sifted. I wouldn't lose a day if I were you. No one but yourself and Mrs. Forrester must know what he is. You must make up some tale to deceive the servants, and meantime you must be supposed to be prosecuting the matter in another direction—to have heard of a clew at Fairtown, half a dozen miles away—and you must let me come and go, and keep up the deception by riding over there in the day, and being known to go to the police-station, and all that. And now, sir, get the detective into your house at once."

Frank listened as he ate, and likewise decided his course of action.

Early next morning he told Coles, in a lowered voice, that he was going to Fairtown; that the policeman thought he had got hold of a clew to the strange affair, and that he should ride there immediately after breakfast, and go to the police-station.

Frank made this communication as if unaware of the presence of another servant who was in the hall at the time, adding, "Perhaps better be silent as to where I am going;" after which remark he felt pretty certain that his business and destination would be whispered from one to the other.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CLEW TO "C. C."

It was after this that Mr. Forrester's servant, Coles, was surprised by being carelessly informed by his master that he had engaged another man to take part in the duties of the establishment.

Coles was surprised, because, for the life of him, he could not see what there was for the new-comer to do; but as Mr. Forrester seemed to think there was need of another servant, and as Coles thought the more the merrier, it did not occur to him to negative the plan.

"You see," continued Frank, "Mrs. Forrester and myself will be going more into society and receiving more often in a short time, and as I heard of this desirable person being without a situation, I have engaged him."

"Very well, sir," replied Coles.

The new man arrived the following evening, and speedily became extremely popular with the household below. This very first evening, during supper, he told anecdote after anecdote and sent them all into fits of laughter.

"We shall be lively now you've come, Mr. Hopkins," said Coles, cordially.

"Now don't you flatter a bashful man, Mr. Coles, or I shall leave the room!" exclaimed Hopkins, suiting the action to the word, and running out of the servants' hall as if he couldn't stay to hear his own praises.

"He's a rum one, he is," remarked Coles.

"And a precious sharp young man, too, or I'm mistaken," said Mrs. Hart.

Mr. Forrester, having intimated to Coles that Hopkins could take down tea from the drawing-room that evening, as his mistress wished to see the new servant, Hopkins answered the bell and went up stairs.

Once within the drawing-room, out of sight of the servants, the manner of the man underwent a change. He approached his employers with confidence, saying, in a low voice, "Do you know anything of the antecedents of your kitchen-maid?"

"Nothing particular," answered Liline, who was reclining on a couch by the fire. "She is a very quiet young woman, her fellow-servants say."

"Still, ma'am," continued the so-called Hopkins, in the same guarded tone,—"still, it is unnatural that when all the rest of her companions were laughing and talking 'round her she never said a word. I declare she made me feel uncomfortable! 'Twas as if she suspected something. Have you remarked that she hasn't a pleasant expression of countenance? And she doesn't laugh! Of course, at present, it is merely conjecture, but I'd almost wager that she is the young woman who corresponds with C. C."

"And her name," cried Liline, in great agitation at the mere remembrance,—"her name is Nancy—Nancy Wood! Those dreadful men who carried me off spoke of Nan."

"I'll keep my eye on her, ma'am. If there's anything to find out, I mean to discover it. Fortunately, that girl is good-looking, and I shall pay my addresses to her forthwith."

"Oh, I see!" said Frank, laughing.

"I shall make her speak to me," continued the new man, with an answering smile.

"You've been a pretty long time up-stairs, Mr. Hopkins," cried Coles, as the former descended with the tea-equipage. "What did you find to keep you there so long?"

"That's soon told, Mr. Coles. My new missus has an eye to beauty, and as soon as she sees me, she was attracted. 'I haven't seen you yet,' she remarks; and then she goes on question after question, as ladies will. How old was I? Was I church or chapel? And a dozen other things. She's nice-looking, is my new missus!"

"Very," responded Coles. "I hope she returns your admiration!"

"Mr. Coles," said the new man, "the admiration I feel for some one else—admiration born within me but a fleeting hour since, during our late repast—makes it perfectly indifferent to me whose favor I gain so long as I am

fortunate enough to win the regard of one who shall be nameless!"

And with that, Mr. Hopkins began to whistle a plaintive air, as he looked at the fire in contemplative mood.

After this speech he was pretty certain that he had raised the question in the mind of each of the female servants—"Which of us does he mean?"

"That is falling in love at first sight, and no mistake," laughed Coles.

Another day passed. Nancy Wood, when going along one of the passages toward evening, was accosted by Hopkins.

"Stay!" he breathed, softly. "You can spare me a minute, surely; I'll do anything for you in return. You heard what I said last night about one whose liking I wanted to win. From the time I first set eyes upon you I said to myself, 'That's the girl for me!' The others are all very well, but they won't do for me. You come for a walk with me to-morrow, Sunday. Promise, now, or I won't let go your hand!"

Was she flattered by his words? She was so very sharp, that he could hardly tell, but she half-smiled as she answered, "Mr. Hopkins, I've got one sweetheart already!"

"One! A girl like you must have a dozen! But you're not bound to have a young man because you call him your sweetheart! Never mind him next Sunday. You come with me for a walk. Where does he live? Hereabouts?"

"Not close by. His home is in Crayford—a village two miles or so from here."

"That's where C. C. lives, I'll be bound!" said Hopkins, to himself.

"And what is his name?" asked the latter aloud, insinuatingly.

"He's called Cli—Charlie, I mean," answered Nancy, stammering.

"And a very good name, too; but I want you to like mine better. Mine is William, and I hope before long it will be like some flowers you and I have gathered—*sweet* William to you! I declare the very sight of you makes me poetical."

He was making a little impression on her—he could see that.

"Promise me about Sunday," he urged.

"I think I'll come," she said, hurriedly.

"Thank you, my dear. We'll have a nice walk together, and I'll tell you all about my own folks, and the nice bit of money I've saved; but what's the use of money if a man's not to be happy in his own way? *My* way is to get a wife, and set up in some business. 'Tis better than dragging on in service."

Nancy seemed to listen to this, and it was fully agreed that their walk should come off next day.

That evening Mr. Forrester told Hopkins, while Coles was in the room, to take a letter to the Vicarage immediately after dinner, and to wait for an answer.

But the so-called Hopkins, when outside the house, cut across the fields in the direction of Crayford, and, going to the public-house there, got into conversation with some men who were drinking in the taproom.

It was past eleven o'clock before he returned to Mr. Forrester's.

"He'll get the sack if he plays *this* game!" remarked Coles to Mrs. Hart.

Apparently, however, his master was satisfied with his excuses concerning the length of time he had been absent, and next day he and Miss Nancy Wood wandered off together in the afternoon.

Mr. Hopkins was in high spirits, and Nancy in her smartest attire.

"When a man is serious in his intentions, my dear," he began, after a few preliminary compliments, "he likes his young lady to know all about him. I've nobody to hinder my wish to marry—no old mother that I ought to support. I'm my own master, and as I told you, I've saved a nice little sum."

Nancy gave him her best attention; and he led on to talk about *her* friends, and then asked her what Charlie did for a living.

"All sorts of things," answered she, with a confused manner not lost on him.

But he only replied, carelessly, "I see; Jack-of-all-trades—master of none. That won't do for you, Nancy. Have you got his likeness, I wonder?"

"Yes; a photo," she answered.

"You must manage to get out again before next Sunday," said he, as they parted. "I can't wait a whole week for such another nice walk."

Nancy promised; and then he declared she should not keep that fellow Charlie's likeness any longer—she should give it to him.

"Pretty well for two days! I shall find Mr. C. C. in time, no doubt!" said Mr. Hopkins to himself, at the very moment when Nancy was taking off her bonnet, and dwelling on the proposals of the new man servant.

"'Twould be a comfort to have a settled home, and have done with it!" muttered she.

"If by any chance I could overhaul the young lady's box, ma'am, it might expedite matters," remarked Mr. Hopkins to Mrs. Forrester as he cleared away tea that evening. Could you send the servants for a holiday anywhere for a few hours? Or, stay! Next Sunday morning will do. Could you order a cold luncheon and a cold dinner for us servants, ma'am? And then say all can go to church, excepting one, and that Hopkins had better remain in the house?"

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Forrester. "But a week is a long time to wait."

"I have it!" cried Frank. "A concert is advertised in the next town for Wednesday. I can take tickets for all the servants, excepting one; and you must be the one to remain at home, Hopkins."

"That will do famously, sir."

Accordingly, on the Wednesday morning, the housekeeper was informed that the tickets were at the disposal of the servants, and she hoped all would go and enjoy themselves; that she and Mr. Forrester would dine at six, so as to give plenty of time for the concert, and that Hopkins could remain at home.

Nancy Wood was disappointed when she found that her new admirer was not to be one of the party; but she cheered up under his flattering words as he assured her that she should not be out of his thoughts during the whole evening.

No sooner had the wagonette containing the party bound for the concert driven off, than Mr. Hopkins was escorted up-stairs by Mr. Forrester himself.

"The girl Nancy Wood sleeps in this room," explained Frank; "and her boxes are here."

"You've made no mistake, sir, I hope."

"Oh, no. Mrs. Forrester gave me plain directions. Now, let me assist you."

"There's nothing for you to do, sir, but to hold the candle, if you please."

Then the detective went to work, produced keys of various sorts, and soon had both of Miss Wood's trunks under his inspection. He was very careful to leave all things as he had found them. There were several letters in each box, tossed indiscriminately among dresses and linen, but there were none signed "C. C."

The detective seemed disappointed. Presently, however, "Here it is at last!" exclaimed he. "At least we have a clew to C. C."

"What!" said Frank, quickly; "have you found a letter from the man?"

"None from himself. It is a line which the girl has written and never sent. Read for yourself, sir."

It was a mere torn scrap of paper which probably had been tossed away. On it these words were plainly legible:—

"No end of bother! So be sure not to sign C. C. any—"

This was all; but it was enough for the clever London detective who was personating a servant out of livery.

"I'll go on carefully with my search, sir. I feel sure now as to who received that slip of paper, making an appointment by the hollow oak. But it would be a great help to find

a letter from C. C. himself. He's Miss Nancy's sweetheart, no doubt, and I shall get into a chat with him one of these fine evenings at the Crayford public-house."

Hopkins (whose real name was Millar) looked into every corner, and in the lid of a very untidy work-box found a dirty crumpled letter with no signature.

There was not much in it apparently, but the detective read it over carefully, and as carefully returned it to its place.

"I don't see anything in it connected with C. C.," remarked Frank. "It seems to be only a reminder to the girl to meet some one on the Sunday; though, certainly, there is this remark, which I don't understand—'Climbing Cat will do the old gentleman's business yet, or he'll know why!'"

"Climbing Cat!" exclaimed the detective. "That's it! We're on the track of C. C., now, sir, without a doubt!"

CHAPTER IX.

WORSE AND WORSE.

A THOUSAND tender words, mutual entreaties for forgiveness, renewed and fervent protestations of never-dying affection, had passed between the young wife and her husband in the few days which had elapsed since Frank's return. Each told the other that, after this lesson, it would not be possible to allow mistrust to disturb their love.

And so happiness and deep content came back to them, and Liliane and Frank were once more all in all to each other.

They were ever together, and she was fast regaining her usual strength, which had received so great a shock from late occurrences.

But while Liliane and Frank were thus delighting in restored joy, another pair of lovers, as absorbed in each other, but separated by many circumstances, saw the horizon of their life darken still more around them, without much hope in the distance to support them through the sorrowful hours.

Dorinda and Stanhope could only meet by stealth, and then but for a few fleeting moments, in cold and darkness, attended by an uncomfortable feeling of danger.

More than this, a crisis had arrived in Stanhope's life, and he and Dorinda must part—part with a thousand promises and pledges to meet again when he could claim her as his wife. But that hope was faint and distant; and how much both would have, meantime, to endure!

It was about a week since the night of the concert. Numerous had been Mr. Hopkins's visits to the public-house in Crayford, where he smoked and played cards with the idle fellows who congregated there, and comported himself in a manner which would have scandalized Frank Forrester.

Coles was by this time deeply indignant that the new man servant was so frequently absent. He was so much aggrieved that he told his master he couldn't approve of Hopkins's ways—that he believed he was out after the other servants were in bed, and "was up to no good."

"I'll watch him myself, Coles. Thank you for warning me," said Frank, gravely. "I shall sit up to-night and see what time he does come in."

Now, on this evening there had been a great scene at Worsley Grange between its owner and young Stanhope Worsley; and if Frank and Liliane could have witnessed it, they would have materially changed their opinion of the seemingly mild and dignified Mr. Worsley.

He was strangely unlike the amiable gentleman who had driven over to luncheon at Liliane's that very day, accompanied by his wife and daughters.

Frank Forrester had not failed to inquire for Stanhope with all the interest he felt; and then Mr. Worsley, taking Frank aside, had said how deeply the young man's behavior had pained him; that Stanhope had nearly broken one of his dear girl's hearts by paying her every attention, and never coming to the point; that

he took every advantage of the indulgence he had always shown him on account of past circumstances; but that things had come to such a pitch, he must make some arrangement to save his dear child from lasting unhappiness. Grieved as he should be not to have Stanhope at the Grange, it would be better that he should receive an allowance, and travel, or enter some profession.

"I had hoped, however, that he would have lived at the Grange as a son, and become one in reality," sighed the placid-looking, gray-haired gentleman.

Frank could only express a hope that he would not banish Stanhope hastily; and said that, of course, the young man felt sore on the subject of the property.

Mrs. Worsley interrupted these confidences, by saying that the days were yet short, and that they had a long drive home. And then the visitors entered their luxurious carriage, and were taken back to Worsley Grange, where they arrived just as dusk was stealing on rapidly and the fire-light made the beautiful old house especially cheery in contrast to coming darkness.

As Mr. Worsley entered his study, a lofty room, replete with every comfort, he distinguished the figure of a tall young man on the hearth-rug, who turned round hastily on his entrance.

"I have waited for you very impatiently, sir," began the young fellow.

"Indeed!" replied the elder one, with a sneer. "You should be impatient rather to see my daughter Helen than me. I thought it was distinctly understood at our last interview, that you were not to come here unless you were willing to marry her. Her feelings shall not be played with any more."

Stanhope laughed ironically.

"No one has played with Helen's feelings but yourself," he said. "She has been worried and talked into thinking of me, while all the time her real liking is set on some one else, who would have gladly married her had he not been driven away."

"Hold your tongue, sir!" shouted Mr. Worsley.

"It is time that I spoke out. You have always known that I would not marry any one of your family," answered Stanhope.

"Then be a beggar!" exclaimed the elder man.

"That is hardly the position in which my own father left you!" broke from Stanhope's lips. "How do I know what undue influence makes me to-day a dependent, where by right I should be master?"

"Undue influence!" echoed the other, furiously. "What do you know of the friendship which bound your father and I together? You were not born when he disposed of his property. He said that I was more to him than the whole world besides; that I had done more than save his life—had made him able to bear it. The laws of your country uphold my right to what he freely left me. I have brought you up here as one of my own children, and now you turn against me. I offer you Worsley Grange on a condition that any man would jump at—namely, to become my son in reality, and, in return, you destroy the peace of my home."

"You offer me Worsley Grange at the expense of my life's happiness! You have let me grow up here, it is true; but you have put me into no profession, have kept me dependent on you; and now place beggary before me—you have inherited all!"

"Beggary indeed! A well-brought-up girl, and the position of an elder son in this house—or a hundred a year, and to make your own way in one of our colonies."

"One hundred out of nine thousand a year?" said Stanhope, bitterly.

"Those thousands a year are mine legally!" returned Mr. Worsley.

"Morally it should be impossible to you to take them!" cried Stanhope.

And the discussion went on, till the end of

it was that the young man, who had been goaded in every way for some time past, and forced during the past few years to absent himself almost constantly from the Grange, found himself definitely banished, forbidden to return there, and was now houseless, with only about thirty pounds in his possession with which to begin the world.

It was one of those nights when he expected Dorinda to be waiting for him, and he took the way to the little cottage which she and her strange guardian inhabited.

Stanhope had intended that day to have made Mr. Worsley distinctly understand that it was idle to expect him to marry Helen; and had also meant to demand some adequate provision, or that he should be trained for some profession, a right to which he was surely entitled, since, as he had been reared in luxury, it would be most cruel to turn him, helpless, on the world.

But the interview had had a far different conclusion to what Stanhope had intended; and as he stood outside the Worsley mansion, shivering with cold and excitement, he asked himself what he *could* do?

Of one thing only was he quite convinced—he must see Dorinda.

The cottage she lived in was a long way off—six miles—even taking the short cuts he did, across fields and byways.

However, the night was still, and there was light enough to guide him.

He went on rapidly—very rapidly, the fever in his blood urging him forward.

But he had been fasting all day, and when he had got to the village of Crayford stopped, debating with himself where he might get a cup of tea.

The public-house was just before him, a gleam of light issuing from its open door.

It was not too inviting; but there was no other house of entertainment in the village, so he went in.

Several men were drinking and smoking at the bar, and one, better dressed than the rest, looked at him curiously, and then spoke.

"Haven't had the pleasure of seeing you here before, sir! Hope we shall make acquaintance!"

"Thank you. We shouldn't suit each other!" said Stanhope, turning away.

"Can't you see he's not one of *our* sort?" said a tall, evil looking young fellow, with a growl.

The one who had tried to make acquaintance with Stanhope seemed in no way disconcerted, but scanned the latter all the more diligently, till Stanhope turned boldly to him, remarking, "Well, my fine fellow, I hope you'll know me again! I'm certain I shall remember *you*! Now let me give you a bit of advice! Leave this sort of work you're at before it ruins you! And now good-night!"

He could hear the laugh of the men he left behind him; but this in no way disturbed his equanimity. The grave personal matters which weighed on him were too absorbing.

He had entreated Dorinda to meet him tonight in the arbor at the end of the garden, and to come there at eight o'clock, and again at nine, and even ten, should anything detain him at the Grange.

CHAPTER X.

AN EVENING ADVENTURE.

As Stanhope was hurrying to the cottage, Dorinda sat tremblingly in the small parlor of the house.

Mr. Heatherly was asleep, or, at least, she had left him asleep in the dining-room. It was ten minutes to eight; the evening meal was over; the one servant engaged in clearing away. Now was the time to meet Stanhope.

With noiseless footfall, the girl passed down the passage, opened and closed the front door, and hurried on. Since the evening that Mr. Forrester had discovered her at the gate, she had been too timid to meet Stanhope at the end of the garden.

She was pretty sure that her guardian would sleep for an hour, as was his custom in the evening; so, if Stanhope was only there now, what a delightful time they could have together!

And Stanhope was there. Dorinda uttered a suppressed cry of joy as he caught her in his arms, and drew her into the shade of a corner of the roomy old arbor.

"Dear Dorinda, why should you be glad at sight of such an unhappy fellow as I am? Tonight I am a homeless man. My father's friend has not thought it sufficient to take my lands and fortune; he has turned me adrift upon the world. You only keep me from putting a pistol to my head, I believe."

Dorinda nestled closer to him. She uttered low, soft murmurs of possible hope, of her own unutterable devotion, of her readiness to be his in good or evil fortune; nay, of her own happiness to be able to prove to him that it was for himself alone she loved him. And, little by little, Stanhope received comfort.

The young lovers said to each other that they would let nothing divide them—that they would wait, and work, and hope: Dorinda declaring that she would now insist on earning something herself, however little; Stanhope making impossible plans to marry at the end of a year, and begin their married life in lodgings in London. And Dorinda believed all he said. It all seemed quite reasonable to this inexperienced child, and to Stanhope, who was almost as inexperienced as she.

Half an hour, an hour sped by, and still the lovers whispered together, forgetting time.

And now we must go back to the public-house at which Stanhope had stopped to refresh himself on his way to Dorinda's. The man who had then addressed him (no other than Hopkins) speedily produced cards, and gradually lost small sums of money.

All at once, despite the way the game was going in their favor, two of the men rose up, saying "they had business," but "hoped to go on another night."

"We've to be in London to-morrow early; and, as it's getting late, we must be going," remarked they.

"I'll go too, then, gentlemen," said Hopkins, rising.

He leisurely followed them from the house; and once more bidding them "Good-night," went off in an opposite direction—apparently; but no sooner had they vanished from sight than he crept stealthily after them.

His reason for so doing was slight; yet to him it seemed sufficient. Earlier in the evening, over their cards, the elder of the two young men from whom he had just parted had offended his companion by some jesting remark.

"Now, then, shut up, you Climbing Cat!" the other had said, with an evil look.

Hopkins, dealing the cards with unmoved countenance, only remarked, "Don't call each other names, gentlemen. How stands the game?"

To follow the man he had been secretly after so long was the first thought of the detective; but not by word or look did he betray his impatience.

"Off to London? Then they mean to stay here," was his mental comment. "Business. That means villainy of some kind. Now for it!"

He soon came near enough to the men he was pursuing to be sure he was on their track, and their voices floated to him in dispute. Hopkins had taken the precaution to put on india-rubber overshoes, so that his footsteps might give no warning when he had to go on the road.

They went on in this way for over a mile; and then turned off into some fields, Hopkins keeping at a little distance. Then they got into the high road again.

"Are they going to Mr. Forrester's?" thought he.

No; they came to a stand opposite to Mr. Heatherly's cottage, and took the path to that

small side-gate where Frank Forrester had arrested Dorinda.

What could they be going to do *there*?

Hopkins concealed himself behind a clump of bushes, and saw them enter the garden. He followed cautiously.

The men paused, and seemed to listen; then went to the front of the house, and tapped softly against the window.

The detective, not often surprised, was thunderstruck. Mr. Heatherly was poor, but he was accounted a gentleman, far removed from contact with such men as these.

Meantime, Dorinda and Stanhope still lingered in the arbor. Nine, half-past nine had struck, and still Stanhope stayed. How could he tear himself away, for this was to be a long parting?

They had settled, as they thought, a good many things in the last hour. Stanhope was to advertise for employment immediately in the *Times*. He was also to go to London tomorrow. He was to write twice a week to Dorinda, addressing his letters to "Miss Smith, to be left at the post-office, Crayford," till called for, since she could never dare to receive his epistles openly.

And she was to write as often as possible to Stanhope, and at once to propound a plan to her strange old guardian which might enable her to earn a little money and future independence. This magnificent plan was that Dorinda should get the post of teacher to little boys in some school.

"I could certainly make them learn to read and write, Stanhope," said she.

"If only your guardian will consent to your leaving him, my darling," answered Stanhope.

"He is always complaining of his poverty, Stanhope, and this would relieve him of keeping me."

In this fashion the young couple talked on, one of Dorinda's hands clasped fondly in that of Stanhope.

All at once a sound broke on the stillness of night.

"Was that a step, Stanhope?" whispered Dorinda, tremblingly.

Undoubtedly it was a step, and approaching their place of concealment.

A step! More than one!

Stanhope passed his arm around Dorinda's slight form and drew her quite on one side of the roomy entrance to the arbor; so that if anyone entered, he or she might walk in without detecting at once their presence. After all, it might be possible for Dorinda to steal away unperceived; only how should she account for her absence from the house?

Of course the step they had heard upon the gravel must be that of her guardian, or the servant Lucy, sent to look for her. Oh, that it might only be Lucy! But at least two people were approaching the arbor.

"This way!" said a cautious voice—the voice of Dorinda's guardian.

As the lovers stood in the deep gloom, they could distinguish the forms of three people, now close to the summer-house—three men.

They came to a standstill close to the entrance of the arbor, and entered one by one. There was only the small table between these men and the hidden lovers, who remained, without the power of speech or movement.

"Here we can speak without fearing that that woman is on the watch!" said Heatherly, sitting down; and adding to his companions, "The bench is long enough. Sit down; I can talk to you better."

The others, in silence, appeared to obey him. At this instant Stanhope detected the outline of another man's form in the garden, which appeared for a moment, and then vanished. In the dim light this other man could not have been distinguished save for his movement. This figure made no sound; but was he also approaching the arbor?

That was unknown to Stanhope, who only asked himself how he and Dorinda could steal from their hiding-place. But that was impossible, for their forms would be discerned

in the opening if they emerged from the deep gloom in which they stood. What would happen if, by a movement of either of the men so near them, their presence was discovered?

"Well, now, what is there so much to settle? The thing resolves itself into this. Get me the paper, and you shall have, poor as I am, a hundred pounds, and a hundred more in the course of the year. And don't make a blunder this time!"

"We made no blunder," replied one of the men. "How could we tell there would be people in the house?"

"Blunder or not, you didn't succeed!"

"That was not our fault," growled the other.

"Well, is it worth doing or not?" asked Mr. Heatherly, testily.

"Worth?—yes! But there is danger?" said both men slowly.

"I thought you laughed at that!" remarked Heatherly, scornfully. "And I tell you the paper belongs to me. It's no theft!"

"It might be accounted one!" said the men, with an unpleasant laugh; "and you seem to set a good deal on it."

"Take the job or leave it, then!" said Heatherly, raising his voice. On which his listeners changed their tone, declared that if it was to be done it should be done, but that they risked penal servitude, and must have something even if they failed.

"And when is it to come off?" asked Dorinda's guardian. "This waiting is bad for me and you."

"We can't help ourselves. We must bide our opportunity. There's a dinner and ball coming off in a fortnight. Then's the time to do it—to go in as one o' the waiters! Who's to know?"

"Hum!—yes! You'll never get a better chance. But for this accident of mine, which will leave me lame all my life, I'd ask nobody to restore my own property. You won't mistake? What a pity you won't let me write down my instructions; then there could be no misunderstanding."

"We sha'n't forget. Listen, old gentleman! First and foremost, we're to introduce ourselves into the house as waiters; secondly, we're to have matches and a candle ready; thirdly, boots that make no noise; and, fourthly, when the fun is at its height, we're to find our way to the north turret."

"Ah, but how?" interrupted Mr. Heatherly.

"I've got that pat. Turn to the right at the head of the grand staircase, pass through a green baize door at the end of the corridor, then twice to the left, and go into the second door you come to."

"Right! And then?"

"Then lock one door of the room to prevent any one interrupting us, and unlock the other, so as to escape that way if we have to escape."

"Good!" said Mr. Heatherly.

"And then a few minutes will do the work if the paper is there. It will be easy enough."

"I put it behind the wainscot, underneath the picture of a judge in a flowing wig, with his hand on a dog. There is a sliding panel."

"All right!" laughed the men. "We'll have it!"

All this was said in a very low voice, and had not Stanhope and Dorinda been in the arbor it would have been impossible for them to distinguish what was said.

"It is under the picture of a judge with a flowing wig, an ancestor of the real people—the old family, not the present upstarts," repeated Heatherly. "It's not possible to make a mistake if you are sure of the picture, and don't get flurried. Remember, it is the portrait of a man in a wig, his hand resting on the head of a huge dog, who is looking up to his master."

"We shall know that well enough. This day fortnight, then. And now let us separate. One can't keep dark enough on such a business as this!"

"I don't want to stay here, catching my death of cold; but I was obliged to satisfy myself that you knew what you were about!"

"All right, old gentleman! Good-night!" said the two men, rising. "You're not so anxious to get that paper as we are for our money; so you'll have it, never fear."

"Take care, or you'll stumble. There's a step, said Heatherly, testily. "Mind what you are about. Go one by one, or you'll tread on my lame foot."

They passed out within an inch of the place where Stanhope and Dorinda, the latter half fainting, were crouching against the wall of their refuge.

Frank saw two of them going in one direction, the old man Heatherly pausing as if watching them out of sight.

"Oh! what can it mean, Stanhope?" whispered the girl. "They were planning to steal, surely! How terrible!"

"Hush! Don't frighten yourself. They have only been talking about a paper which it seems belongs to your guardian, and is kept from him."

"But then, why not ask for it boldly?"

"I suppose he is pretty sure it would not be given up," answered Stanhope.

A clock striking in the distance roused another fear in the young girl's mind.

"I shall be shut out of the house. Lucy will go to bed, and fasten the door. I must not lose a moment!"

And she fled from the arbor, and from Stanhope's last caress.

Happily, Lucy—a half-deaf, middle-aged woman—was finishing knitting a stocking, and wished to end her work that evening. Seated right in front of the fire, she did not hear Dorinda's light step as she passed through the back kitchen in the dark, nor did she know that Dorinda had unfastened the door after it had been bolted earlier in the evening.

"Why, sure I fastened up here!" muttered Lucy to herself, as she took a look around before going to bed.

CHAPTER XI.

TRACKED.

STANHOPE'S brain was racked with fast-coming questions. The words of the men in conversation with Heatherly had revealed far more to him than to Dorinda. Full well he knew where hung the picture of the judge in flowing wig, one hand resting on a dog's head. Had he not stopped to look at it when, as a boy, he and Helen Worsley and her sisters had played at hide-and-seek together on snowy winter days, when they could not get out of doors? That picture hung in the north turret of Worsley Grange.

What could it mean? Dorinda's guardian employing men to steal away a paper! Truly, Stanhope had never felt so bewildered and miserable in the whole course of his life. The question now was how should he act?

As he left the garden he did not note that a man followed him stealthily—no other than the detective employed by Frank.

Hopkins had lost the track of the other men in a moment—had made a turn thinking to come up with them again at the other end of the garden, and had then caught sight of Stanhope stealing away. Setting him down as one of those he was pursuing, he followed him.

In his great perplexity, Stanhope took the road which passed by Frank Forrester's house. He had remembered that a carpenter's wife in the village let decent lodgings; it was imperative that he should find some shelter for the night.

Besides, he felt now the need of counsel. If he could get a bed at the carpenter's, he would go up and see Forrester in the morning. And so Stanhope took the road which led by Frank's house. Hopkins followed.

His suspicions were by no means allayed when he saw the man whom he was pursuing stop at the carpenter's, and heard him knock till the carpenter's wife put her head out of window, when he asked if he could have shelter for the night?

"It's late, and we don't like letting our rooms to strangers," was the reply from the window.

They were new people in the place, and Worsley Grange was a dozen miles off, so they would not know Stanhope. He persuaded them, however, to take him in by saying that he had got belated, and was going up to Mr. Forrester's in the morning.

This explanation increased the detective's suspicions, but he was very glad to get his man housed.

"I'll nab him in the morning," said he to himself, triumphantly.

He waited till Stanhope had been admitted into the carpenter's house, and then made haste homeward, where Frank was waiting to receive him.

"I think I've unearthed my fox at last, sir," said he, with satisfaction.

"How? Where?" whispered Frank, equally gratified.

"At the carpenter's, close by, where he begged for a bed just for to-night, and pretends to be a friend of yours. I shall be there by daylight."

"And I'll go with you," said Frank.

"It's a queer business altogether, sir," continued Hopkins. "That old gentleman who lives in the house called Moor Cottage, a mile from here, seems to be mixed up in it, too. I have tracked this man from his place, and he and his accomplice were certainly with the old man a good many minutes in his garden, whispering in an arbor there. I could hear nothing they said, though I was crouched outside, at the back."

"What! Mr. Heatherly? Impossible!" cried Frank, thinking of Dorinda.

"So I should have said only that we detectives know that nothing is impossible. I'm sorry for the young lady, though. Hope she's not his daughter?"

"His ward, I believe, though she bears his name."

"Well, sir, we must be early at the carpenter's."

"I will not fail you," returned Frank.

And after some further conversation, they separated.

The gray morning light was breaking over the landscape, and poor, wearied Stanhope was still deep in uneasy slumber, when Frank and the detective, wrapped in their overcoats, arrived opposite the carpenter's house.

"You watch the garden-way, and I'll take the road, sir."

The surprise of Mrs. Hutching, the carpenter's wife, may be surmised when, on opening her door that morning, she perceived Mr. Forrester in her garden, and another man at the gate.

"Dear me! is it you, sir?" said she, with marked astonishment.

"Hush, Mrs. Hutching! You have a suspicious character in your house. If necessary, we must detain him."

Mrs. Hutching turned pale.

Why, they might all have been slaughtered in their beds last night! Oh, it would be a lesson to her not to take in a stranger again!

With bated breath, she watched Mr. Forrester steal up-stairs, followed by the detective.

"That's his room, sir," whispered she.

Frank turned the handle gently. The suspicious character had not taken the precaution to lock his door, so Frank entered, and Hopkins followed.

A young man lay there fast asleep; and as Frank gazed down on him, he uttered a cry of surprise, and the young fellow awoke.

"Who is it?" asked he, staring at the intruder.

"You may well ask!" said Frank, confusedly. "You'll remember me as soon as you're a little more awake! Get up, and come to breakfast with my wife and me. We shall both be delighted to see you!"

"This is an odd mistake, indeed!" continued he, turning with a smile to Hopkins. "This is Mr. Stanhope Worsley, of Worsley Grange!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE NORTH TURRET.

BUT the detective, who had spent so many days in seeking the clew to a mystery, was not to be put off like that.

"I tracked him out of the garden last night; he was hiding there," muttered he.

And, of course, Hopkins being up to his work, had informed himself at the outset of the state of things at Worsley Grange.

"I can't lose sight of that young gentleman till he has answered a few questions, sir," said he, resolutely.

"Very well," replied Frank, laughing at the notion that Stanhope could be implicated in a robbery. "But let him have some breakfast first."

It was during this meal, or rather as they walked arm-in-arm to Mr. Forrester's, that Stanhope told his friend, in a voice too low for Mr. Hopkins to overhear (the latter was walking modestly a few paces behind), all that had occurred last night in the garden.

"Whatever happens, I must shield old Heatherly," said he, "for although he is only Dorinda's step-father, it would distress her acutely should I be the means of placing him in jeopardy."

"The thing will be for you and me to fore-stall the men he is employing," responded Frank, quickly.

"But we should be doing what would give them a taste of penal servitude," answered Stanhope.

"Oh, we won't blunder like that!" cried Frank. "I am a magistrate for this division of the county. By proper representation to a judge it would be easy for me to obtain the right of searching the north turret of Worsley Grange; but I trust that my acquaintanceship with Mr. Worsley will spare all—all necessity for that."

The upshot of this was that Mr. Forrester dispatched the following note to the Grange:—

"DEAR MR. WORSLEY,—

"The late mysterious attack on your house has made me employ a detective to unravel the affair. He has lived in my house in the guise of an additional man-servant for the past few days.

"Another suspicious circumstance obliges me to ask your permission to bring this man to the Grange. I will accompany him, with Mr. Stanhope Worsley, who has been instrumental in giving us another clew, which may, or may not, be connected with the late affair.

"I regret deeply to learn that there is, at present, a family misunderstanding between yourself and my friend Stanhope, and can only hope it may not be lasting.

"Yours very truly,

"E. FORRESTER."

"Put in that way, he can hardly deny us admittance," said Frank; "while if this concealed paper, on which Mr. Heatherly sets so much value, ought to be restored to him, it cannot be kept from him, found, as it will be, in the presence of responsible witnesses."

But Stanhope was not entirely satisfied with this arrangement.

Suppose the hidden paper incriminated Dorinda's guardian? In that case, he (Stanhope) would have been instrumental in placing the old man in the hands of justice.

"I must warn him," decided Stanhope.

And he too sent a note, without, however, giving a hint of it to Frank.

It went by post, and was as follows:

"SIR,—Chance made the writer of this note a listener to your conversation last night with the two men who were with you in the arbor in your garden. If the paper you then mentioned as being concealed in the north turret of Worsley Grange is yours by right, it will be restored to you intact before to-night falls. If it is anything which endangers you, this comes as a warning, and you can act accordingly."

Frank Forrester had judged it best to follow his missive immediately, so as not to give time for Mr. Worsley to forbid him to bring Stanhope to the Grange. And Stanhope was indispensable as a guide, Frank never having penetrated to the north turret.

In consequence of this, as the drive was one of a dozen miles, the two gentlemen, with the detective, were to start as early as half-past eight—some half-hour before letters reached the Grange by morning post.

Stanhope, too, reflected that Mr. Heatherly would not receive his note till they were far on their way. Then he could not stop their action in this matter, even if he followed them post haste.

During the day preceding Stanhope had remained a guest of the Forresters, and (since Frank was already aware of it) had confided to Liliane his deep affection for the beautiful Dorinda.

"We must do something for them, Frank!—we must help them to be happy! You must get some employment for this nice Mr. Stanhope Worsley, and Dorinda and he must be married." And as Frank only smiled, she added, warmly: "He is perfectly delightful! You must help them, Frank!"

"Take care, or I shall be jealous!" returned he, kissing her fondly.

"You are an old goose!" she rejoined, affectionately.

And, though no more was said, Liliane felt assured that her dear Frank would get young Stanhope some appointment; and went about singing snatches of song to herself all the morning in the exuberance of her content. Indeed, this happy young match-maker had, in idea, already given the wedding-breakfast, and presented Dorinda with her dress for the great occasion.

But Frank did not go about singing. He did not even whistle; for he reflected that, even if all Liliane's kind wishes could be carried out, it could not give the Grange to Stanhope Worsley, and that he would feel the wrong all his life.

Next morning dawned; and at the hour fixed on, Hopkins, having taken a particularly affectionate leave of Miss Nancy for the day, started with the two gentlemen. The weather was fine, but chill; and Stanhope long remembered that drive in the cold spring morning, and the unlooked-for termination of their errand.

Eleven o'clock was striking by all the clocks inside and outside of the Grange as Frank Forrester drove up to the wide entrance.

Mr. Worsley met them at the hall door. He shook hands with Frank, took no notice whatever of Stanhope, and offered the former refreshments.

"Do have a glass of wine, at least!" urged he, as Frank refused his offer.

"No, thank you; let's get our business over first!" Then, sinking his voice: "We want to search the north turret."

"The north turret!" ejaculated Mr. Worsley. "You don't think that men are concealed there?"

"No; we have no cause to conclude that, but the place must be searched, and at once, to prevent an inroad by housebreakers."

"I'll go with you myself," said Mr. Worsley. And led the way to the north turret.

Meeting his wife and daughters on the staircase, he explained in a few words their errand; and they, too, moved by curiosity, followed.

On they went, up many stairs, traversing many passages, until they reached the disused chamber, which, from its cold northern aspect, and the size of the house, had been practically uninhabited, except on special occasions, for twenty years and more. But, when the family were at the Grange, all the windows were opened every day.

The cold light came chilly in on this morning, and the portrait of the judge with flowing wig, his hand on a dog's head, stared at the party who entered.

"It must be here," said Stanhope, speaking for the first time.

Without a word the detective went to work, while all stood watching him in silence.

What was it he, at length, held up to view?

Only a thin, long tin case, inclosing something covered with dust.

"Is that all?" cried Helen Worsley, with a light laugh.

They brushed off the dust, they unfolded a paper it contained, the detective made a hasty step forward, and Stanhope grew faint with sudden emotion as Frank exclaimed, "It is a will!"

And he began to read, in moved and troubled voice, a few lines.

What was it which made Mr. Worsley totter and fall back on the old-fashioned couch at hand, losing consciousness?

"Oh! is it true—can it be true? He knew nothing of this, I am certain!" wept Mrs. Worsley.

"No; of course not," answered Frank, kindly. "You see he himself led the way here. Let me carry Mr. Worsley to his room."

They did so—to the room which was his no longer; for they had discovered in their search the will believed to have been destroyed twenty-three years previously—the will which gave the Grange to the heir, if an heir should be born, leaving only the house in the West of England, with eighteen hundred a year for life, to the man who had so long enjoyed possession of the larger property.

And while the latter lay half unconscious on his bed, the daughters crowded, weeping, round Stanhope.

"Oh, poor papa! He was harsh to you, but you would never prosecute him, Stanhope? For our mother's sake—for ours! Besides, he did not know of this will!"

"I do not think he did. Don't feel any alarm, Helen. Minnie, try to calm your mother. Of course I shall take care you are not distressed."

And so, by degrees, Stanhope got free of the afflicted daughters, and hastily conferred with Frank what steps to pursue next.

It was not till late in the afternoon that he could leave Worsley Grange, and take the road to Mr. Heatherly's cottage. Openly he would go now to confer with the irascible guardian, to claim Dorinda as his bride, and to demand an explanation of how the will came to be to him such a matter of paramount importance.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONCLUSION.

As Stanhope approached the house in the gathering dusk, the whole place looked inexpressibly gloomy. No light gleamed from the windows, no noise or stir of life broke the mournful silence. The young man knocked at the front door, and, after some delay, Lucy, the servant, came to open it.

"No; you can't see Mr. Heatherly, sir, 'cause we can't find him nowheres; he was like one distracted this morning, and rushed out without answering Miss Dorinda's questions. Poor young lady! she's worn out going here and there searching for him! I don't know what's to happen. I can't stay here in such a house!"

"Can I see Miss Dorinda?" asked Stanhope. But at that moment Dorinda herself appeared. Pale, fatigued, and infinitely troubled as she was, her youthful beauty was never greater nor more touching.

"Stanhope!" faltered she, alarmed.

"We need not meet in secret any longer!" cried he, in rapture. "I can offer you a home now!"

For a moment her delight at sight of him swept away other fears; but then she cried, "My guardian—what can have become of him? And he is lame. He said such strange words to me this morning!"

"What did he say, my own dear love?"

"He said, 'I am betrayed. You will be left alone, Dorinda!'"

"Then he has fled. But we must find him!" exclaimed Frank. "Did he say nothing more?"

"He said if he wrote to me, or if he came, I must be ready to—to fly; that I must get together all the little jewelry I had. Has he done something bad, Stanhope?"

"We shall set it all right, darling. Happily, it has to do with my property, and, of course, I shall not prosecute."

"Oh, Stanhope!"

Her head fell on his shoulder. Lucy, smiling to herself, had retired. The wind sighed mournfully round the cottage, and—for it had

begun to rain—a patter of drops added to the dismal appearance of the hour.

The little passage was all in darkness, save that, at the end of it, a gleam of firelight broke across it from the open door of the kitchen.

Stanhope was whispering to Dorinda that he must take her away to Mrs. Forrester's, when, almost noiselessly, the door opened, and a head appeared in the opening, but just visible against the dim light outside.

Dorind uttered a cry.

"There he is—my guardian!"

Stanhope was out of doors in a moment, and had no difficulty in coming up with the old man, whose lameness was against him.

"Fear nothing; I have the will!" cried Stanhope. "Come into the house; but bless Dorinda for your safety! "She and I have agreed to marry each other."

Even with these assurances the wretched man could hardly be quieted. But he believed in the truth of the innocent girl whose money he had squandered and used for himself, abusing his position as her sole trustee; and so they got him indoors, in a pitiable state.

"Confess all, and you are safe!" urged Stanhope. "But if you won't make a clean breast of it, how am I to shield you?"

And, at last, he gathered courage.

"D'ye guess who I am?" he whispered.

"How should I?" said Stanhope.

"My name's Lanly. I'm old Worsley's own brother! He did know of the will, but never thought it would turn up against him. Moreover, he didn't know where it was."

"Go on," said Frank, in a low voice.

"You'll save me from—from exposure; from coming before a—a magistrate?"

"On condition, and only on the condition, that you tell me all."

Little by little, the wretched man did so. It was true that Stanhope's father had grown to dread the tyranny of the man he had so trusted, and that he had so earnestly wished to leave his estate to his young wife, and to his heir—should one be born—that he had secured the will from Richard Lanly's hands in a small oaken box, studded with nails, of which he alone had the key, nor was it possible to tamper with the intricate lock.

But it happened that Richard knew that his brother Thomas had a natural aptitude for carpenter's work, and having accurately taken the dimensions of the box, had employed him to make one after the exact pattern of it.

Being always about his too trusting friend's room, it was easy for him to note the pattern of the key, the impress of which he took in wax, and three weeks saw him in possession of a box the fac-simile of the original one. Into this Richard Lanly placed the will he wished to be read on the day of the funeral; his brother, meantime, carrying off the later will which revoked the other. That very evening he placed it in its hiding-place in the north turret, declaring to Richard that he had destroyed it.

Soon after this he confessed its existence, but was defied by Richard. The latter was in possession of the estate. He represented to his brother that if it were true that he had preserved the will, by producing it he would ruin himself also, since that would proclaim him equally guilty; whereas, by silence he would materially benefit.

It was almost immediately after this that Thomas Lanly showed signs of mental derangement, and was for a short time in a private asylum. This circumstance was ever hereafter used by the elder brother to impress on the younger one the fact that no one would credit him concerning the will, and that, should he produce it, it would be said that it was forged.

These representations had their weight, and though Richard Lanly generally disbelieved his brother's assertion that the will he feared was still in existence, he gave him five hundred pounds, and told him to try sheep-farming in New Zealand. Visions of becoming a millionaire crossed the mind of Thomas. He went to New Zealand, and there married a rich young

widow, who already had a baby daughter—Dorinda Heatherly.

Wealth came indeed to Thomas Lanly sooner than he had dreamed of. His new wife died, leaving him sole trustee of Dorinda's fortune.

For a few years he lived in reckless extravagance; but when he had spent all his own money, and most of Dorinda's, he determined to return to England. His brother must help him now.

But Richard coolly denied that he knew anything of former circumstances; and, moreover, plainly declared that he would not have him coming to Worsley Grange; that if he did, he would have him secured again in an asylum.

This threat silenced Thomas, especially as his brother assured him that the will in question had been found; and, not being duly worded, had been destroyed as useless.

The discomfited Thomas left the Grange, burning with revenge. He changed his name, took that of Heatherly, and located himself, unknown to his brother, in the neighborhood, brooding continually on the means of ascertaining if the will was or was not in existence.

Sometimes he believed that it was actually destroyed; at others felt as sure that it was still in its secret hiding-place.

Next he tried to climb to the north turret one summer night; but fell some feet, and with difficulty dragged himself away to escape detection. From that night he had been too lame to make another attempt in person.

No wonder that his disordered mind at length resorted to other means of getting possession of the will, and that he employed C. C. and his confederates, with whom he fell in by chance when returning home one night belated, and whose conversation satisfied him as to the kind of men they were.

One day after this, just at the conclusion of dinner in the servants' hall at Mr. Forrester's, the supposed Mr. Hopkins remarked, quite suddenly, "Ladies and gentlemen, I'm going to surprise you all. I'm going to surprise you, too, my dear,"—turning to Nancy Wood.

Miss Nancy's face wore an easy smile.

She thought he must be about to proclaim to her fellow-servants the fact that he and she were shortly to be married. That he should do so in this public manner, gratified Nancy.

"I'm not the humble individual you've set me down for," continued Hopkins, looking around him.

Then, as all eyes were fixed on him, he made an effective pause.

"Who are you, I should like to know?" asked Coles, scornfully.

"Who?" smiled Hopkins. "I'm a London detective!"

There was a curious lull in the assemblage.

Nancy turned very white.

"We've found 'C. C.', my dear," continued he, addressing Miss Wood; "and let me earnestly advise you, if you get clear of him this time, to break with him altogether. It will be my painful business to give evidence against you in court; but I hope that as you didn't meet him that night you know of, it'll tell for you, and that you'll get off."

Here he whistled, and poor Nancy, in hysterics, was led off by two policemen, who had been waiting outside.

"Mr. Coles," said Hopkins, turning to that gentleman, with cordiality, "you've had a time of trial with me in the house, and you've behaved nobly. Give me your hand, and come and see me and Mrs. Millar when you go to town. Ladies and gentlemen, good-by! My best wishes! 'C. C.' won't trouble you again."

And so the London detective took his departure.

There was a silence for a few moments, which was broken by Coles.

"That is a great man," he said, "and I shall be proud to keep up our acquaintance, begun in such a remarkable way."

A sudden outburst of comment from all present followed,

Now that they came to put things together, they might have known Mr. Hopkins was no ordinary servant. They might have been sure that Mr. and Mrs. Forrester would never have let any one "go on" as he had done.

Nancy's departure, or rather the manner of it, shocked them all. One of them to be in communication with a thief! And all looked forward with a thrill of horror mingled with curiosity as to what her fate would be.

Many days rose and fell before that, and the fate of others connected with this story was decided. We will speak first of the Worsleys, or rather the Lanlys, for Stanhope made it a point that their real name should be resumed. As soon as Mr. Worsley recovered, he was glad to slink away to that remote and small estate he had so much despised, and for which he had so grievously wronged another.

His daughter Helen married the man who had long thought his suit hopeless, and the three youngest accommodated themselves to their new and more modest fortunes. They took to gardening, and made their house bright with roses and all manner of flowers, and threw themselves into parish work, so that in due time Minnie married one of the curates of the place, Sophy accepted the hand of the village doctor, and the remaining sister wedded a man who was visiting in the neighborhood, and who had a civil appointment abroad.

When the trial of C. C., *alias* Climbing Cat, *alias* Charles Cave, took place, and Nancy Wood was charged as an accomplice, either Mr. Millar gave his evidence in the most favorable light, or Frank Forrester was willing that the girl should escape a prison. At any rate, she was dismissed with a caution. But C. C. had been concerned in too many questionable affairs, and had been so often before the police, that he did not this time get off scot-free; but received two years' imprisonment.

"I thought I was in for penal servitude," he muttered, as he was led away.

Mr. Heatherly, or rather Mr. Thomas Lanly, who, perhaps, deserved a prison fully as much, save that his mind had undoubtedly once been affected, was allowed to get off scot-free, to spare Dorinda's feelings; and his brother Richard, once the usurper of Worsley Grange, had become so subdued (and we may add so afraid of a whisper of the truth concerning the will getting abroad in his new neighborhood), that he allowed his brother a hundred and fifty pounds a year.

As to Mr. Richard himself, he never held up his head again, and though no further punishment fell to his lot, felt himself a banished and disgraced man.

From all these we turn to hear what became of Dorinda Heatherly, and to listen to the bells which rung at her bridal.

She and Stanhope were married from Frank Forrester's house, and Liline took the warmest interest in the love of the happy pair whose fate she herself had so unconsciously influenced. But they were not wedded till summer had fully dawned, and the intervening time Dorinda had spent as a guest at the Forresters', learning to love Liline more and more each day.

"If you had never gone that night to the Hollow Oak I and Stanhope would have had a very different Fate. Dear Liline, you must never regret it again!" she said, as she whispered to Mrs. Forrester her good-by on starting for her wedding-tour.

"Good-by, but come back very soon! We'll give you such a welcome!" cries Frank Forrester, as the carriage containing the young couple is about to drive off. The happy pair bend forward to wave their affectionate adieux, and the carriage whisks away amid hurrahs and best wishes, flowers, favors and satin shoes.

Frank gets Liline's hand in his, and whispers: "It was just such a morning as this that you and I were married. And I am sure I love you better, dearest, as every day goes by!"

THE END.

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